

LEVEL
ONE



Legajo 162

The Secret Case of Isabel Lopez — burned at the stake — and why a modern convert is obsessed with the closet Jews of the Spanish Inquisition.

A "Red-Diaper" daughter — what makes her angry about Jewish life today

Feminism in Orthodoxy?

Blu Greenberg's optimistic vision of a revolution in very small steps

RU 486

The other fight for abortion rights

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by Blu Greenberg

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**SUMMER 1992
VOL. 17, NO. 3**

LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: "After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said: 'We are equal because we both come from the earth . . .'" (From *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b)

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FROM THE EDITOR

Listen to this from a college junior when I gave a talk to a group of Jewish women students on eating disorders among Jewish women. "I'm not anorexic or bulimic or anything but if you added up all the time my roommates and I spend talking about what we've eaten and what we haven't eaten, and what we shouldn't have eaten but couldn't resist, and what we're not going to eat the next day, and whether your sweater tucked in or hanging out makes you look fat, it's like we're wasting half our lives. Imagine all the other things we could be doing with that energy. We could be remaking the world!"

The time has come for us to talk about the special demons Jewish women fight when it comes to self-esteem and body image. There's a Jewish spin on body politics.

Jewish women are vulnerable, as all women are right now, to shaping themselves (literally) to the expectations of others—whether men or other women with whom they're forced to compete. (Dieting together and talking about dieting is both an arena of competition among women and, paradoxically, a means of bonding. Judith Rodin points out in a new book, *Body Traps*.)

There is an added dimension to the problem for Jewish women. Perfectionism and high achievement seem to be linked to anorexia. Since Jewish women are the best educated women in the United States today, we've come to expect that we'll be able to achieve all our goals—and accomplish them perfectly—if only we work hard and get straight A's. Many Jewish women have been reared believing in the possibility of perfection. A B+ isn't good enough, a near-perfect tennis match or dissertation defense or goat-cheese salad isn't good enough, being a "good enough" parent (the title of two separate child-rearing books) isn't good enough.

Perfection is hard to achieve, and perfectionism is a risk factor for eating disorders. It's a hard

world out there. You don't get straight A's in real life. Self-starvation can give women the illusion of control and accomplishment.

Though it might seem that well-educated women with interesting careers would be less vulnerable than others to an artificial image of "the perfect body," the risk of developing an eating disorder actually seems to *increase* for high-powered women. Being able to function well in an environment outside one's home is no guarantee that one will be any less enslaved by unrealistic ideas of what a woman's body should look like. Rodin suggests that perfectionism and high achievement put a woman at *greater* risk, rather than protecting her from preoccupation with her weight.

Part of the Superwoman mystique for Jewish women is that not only are we expected to "make something" of ourselves and to have happy and procreative family lives, but the norm now also includes physical perfection—a decidedly un-Jewish view. And we all collude. People may shy away from descriptions by race (it would be considered impolite to say "she's the Asian woman; he's the Black man") but descriptors based on body image are still very much the fashion. "Oh yes, she's that big woman with the enormous hips." Or this, from a woman in her twenties: "I was very, very ill with a problem that took many weeks to diagnose, and I lost about 35 pounds. Friends came up to me and said, 'You look fabulous! Try to keep that weight off.' People didn't even ask me how I was feeling. All they focused on was how thin I'd become from the illness."

In the wake of encounters like this with young Jewish women on campuses and at summer camp, I've taken a vow, and I hope many of LILITH's readers will join me in keeping it: *To make no more mention of weight, size, physical perfections or imperfections when I greet someone or when I describe her.* At the very least we can try to dilute some of the excruciating judgmental attitudes

we've had toward people who have, in reality, not much more control over their bodies' shape than they do over the color of their eyes, the multi-million-dollar-a-year diet industry notwithstanding.

In another vein . . . LILITH's readers are grateful to the Maurice Amado Foundation for supporting work on Sephardic women, the Rita Poretsky Foundation for its support of LILITH's work on women's health issues, The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation for support of LILITH's translations and The Shefa Fund for underwriting a part of LILITH's work on women's philanthropy.

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I was enjoying reading *Guarding The Garden: An Eco-Feminist Play* [Spring 1992] until I got to the part where Lilith says: "Men are pigs!" This statement nullifies any claim to eco-feminist analysis. Eco-feminism views all beings as intrinsically worthy and deserving of respect. Calling men pigs presupposes the unworthiness of pigs.

BATYA BAUMAN
New York, NY

(The writer is President of
Feminists for Animal Rights, Inc.)

After I read the wise feminist interpretation of the Eve Story [Guarding the Garden], I wrote a poem as part of a speech to graduating seniors at our Temple. I drew upon the riches of your Spring 92 issue for further inspiration, referring to two other articles, *The Magical Property of Worrying* and *Ethical Wills*.

I want you to know that as Head of the English Department at Great Neck South High School, I often use articles and references from LILITH to motivate and brighten my teaching.

Thank you for the inspiration you provide for me and, therefore, my colleagues and students.

SHELA PERL
Great Neck, NY

Thank you for printing the article [Spring 1992] on the 1991 conference on child Abuse held in Jerusalem, *Child Protection — A Challenge for Society: American/Israeli International Symposium on the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect*.

A second conference will take place in the fall of 1993; it will also serve as an arena for the exchange of research, skills and techniques and for the comingling of child advocates.

Prospective participants can contact me for further information.

ELAINE KAHANER, MS
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My two sons, age 2 1/2 and 7, are not circumcised. I view circumcision [The Power of the Tribe by David Kotzen-Riech, Spring 1992] as a barbaric mutilation; a medical intervention that has no basis in medical/hygienic technology. (The American Pediatric Association continues to assert, as it has done since 1975, that there is no evident medical advantage or need for routine circumcision.) I also see its historical, Judaic significance nullified by virtue of how many non-Jewish males are circumcised, thereby diffusing the "identifying mark" of a Jew.

The idea of an 8th day ceremony to welcome children (why not daughters too) into the tribe is worth preserving. Many articles have been written outlining the logistics of a "bloodless" bris. I view this as a positive enlightened change in Jewish practice.

Of all the parental and Judaic observance questions that I wrestle with, the one to keep my boys uncircumcised has caused me the least concern. My sons are raised within a Jewish home and community. As I see it, that is what adheres them to Judaism—not the look of their penises. When I see their uncircumcised bodies, I feel serene in my decision to leave them intact as nature, if not God, intended.

JANET TATZ
Missoula, MT

The Power of Women's Folk Judaism by Jane Litman [Fall 1991] has an error. The reference to "a custom of biting,

not cutting, thread (in order not to 'sew up our brains')" does not make sense. What she is probably referring to is the custom of a person being fitted for a garment being given a piece of thread to chew. This is to show that the person is alive, for shrouds are sewn on a corpse. My late mother always made me chew on a piece of thread when she was fixing my hem, "men zol dir nit farneyen dem sekhel."

IDA COHEN SELAVAN
Cincinnati, OH

I write this letter from a prison cell on a cold Sunday afternoon trying to make sense of a very confusing world. My life became one of addictions to drugs, to relationships, and to dangerous excitement. I am extremely lucky to have survived; at age thirty-eight I am starting over. I have faith in myself, my brain, and my body, and I am confident that I have many fulfilling years ahead of me.

My friends aren't as fortunate. Alfonso was a stellar dancer who seemed to have a promising career on Broadway. He had no way of knowing his sexuality would ultimately lead to an AIDS related paralysis that leaves him in a wheelchair, unable to walk, his leotard long gone.

Joan got married recently and in the course of trying to conceive, she and her husband discovered that he tested positive for the HIV virus. His past became their nightmare. Death and disease remain far more than mere statistics in my life. I have a tremendously difficult time rejoicing in my good health while so many of my peers are ill.

Just recently I received a letter from the father of my eleven-year-old son. Ours was a drug-involved relationship centered around abuse, pain, and prison. The drug use that cemented us to each other also

infected him with the HIV virus. He wants to know why I am healthy and not dying as well. I have no answers. All I can do is turn my rage at what is unfair into action. So I write letters, I make movies, I talk to women, and I laugh and I cry.

My hope is that those of us already committed to health advocacy will continue to reach out, and that those of you who are running scared, at risk and hopeless, might contact a neighborhood clinic, call an AIDS hotline or find an outreach worker, if only to talk.

In the meantime, if you are using drugs intravenously, bleach your needles. If you are turning tricks, use condoms. If you have time to spare, volunteer at an AIDS clinic or hotline. You may help someone along the way.

CAROL GOLDBLATT
317 Mast Road
Goffstown, NH 03045

Thanks for printing the notice about my Judeo-Spanish song project [Tsena Rena, Spring 1992]. I just wanted to point out that I am neither Gerineldo's "founder" (p. 27) nor its "lead performer." Dr. Oro Anahory Librowicz founded and directs the ensemble and we have no "lead" performer. The other group members are Solly Levy and Kelly Sultan Amar; all are Moroccan Judeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardim, and I am Ashkenazi.

JUDITH COHEN
Toronto, Canada

Corrections: In "Why I Love/Hate the German Language" in our Spring 1992 issue we mistakenly omitted the final line of a Gertrud Kolmar poem: "Goldne Kringelhorner deckt". Also, the complete address for Judith Brin Ingber's performance group, *Voices of Sepharad*, is 4209 Basswood Road, Minneapolis, MN 55416.

Women On the Road to Peace: Between Love and Hate, Many Shades of Feeling

While some members of the all-Jewish audience heckled and interrupted the pair of speakers—one Jewish American (Esther Leah Ritz) and one Palestinian American (Najat Arafat Khelil)—a young woman approached Khelil when it was over. “You know, I came prepared to hate you because you’re Palestinian,” she said, introducing herself as a child of a

two years ago by 12 Jewish and 12 Palestinian women from mainstream American Jewish and Palestinian communities, representing a spectrum of political and religious views. The members are leaders in major organizations such as the American Jewish Congress and the Council of Jewish Federations, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Arab Women’s Council. Esther Leah Ritz sits on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Agency, is a past president of the World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers and was the first woman vice president of the Council of Jewish Federations.

The two main goals in

group hammered out some consensus on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict



Dialogue participants Najat Arafat Khelil and Esther Leah Ritz

—demilitarized Palestinian entity on the West Bank and Gaza. They then began traveling in pairs made up of one Jew and one Palestinian to encourage a new outlook on the peace process.

The dialogue between Khelil and Ritz, before an audience at Temple Israel in West Palm Beach, was only the third engagement for a project team. “The Palestinian women were excited after the talk in West Palm Beach because many had never engaged in dialogue with Jewish women besides those from the progressive peace community. As for Jewish women in the audience, many of them, like the Jewish members of the Dialogue Project, had only seen Palestinians (if at all) as waiters or maids in Israeli hotels,” says Reena Bernards, coordinator and a founder of the Dialogue Project.

Ritz told the West Palm Beach audience: “The concept of a territories-for-peace settlement is no longer an alien idea to many Jews.” Khelil added that many Palestinians are “definitely open for peace and accept the idea of a two-state solution.” She added that establishing an economic structure between Israel and Palestine, and educating Jewish and Arab youth can make a two-state solution work.

The intensity of feelings created by discussions between American Jews and American

Palestinians is, of course, no surprise. In the Temple Israel parking lot, unidentified protesters distributed anti-Palestinian literature, and negative letters appeared in the Jewish press. “Sometimes I find it a lot easier to talk to Palestinian women than to many American Jewish men who feel that somehow their position in the community is jeopardized if they speak out for peace in public,” says Ritz. “No one is saying there has to be a love-fest between Arabs and Jews,” Khelil told the audience. “But between love and hate there are many shades of feeling, and one of those will have to do for peace.”

How did Ritz and Khelil come to be involved in The Dialogue Project? For Ritz, the first step began at a Passover Seder when she made the connection between Biblical Jews in exile and the Palestinians today. Khelil is one of those contemporary exiles. Because she was living away from Nablus during the 1967 war and wasn’t included in the post-war census, she lost her rights as a resident of the West Bank town. Now she needs permission to visit her family there and has been unable to claim her share of her mother’s inheritance.

Both Khelil and Ritz recognize that there are some points they many never agree on, such as the meanings of Zionism and the intifada, the definition of terrorism or their views of history, even though they have similar visions for the region. “Still,” Reena Bernards tells the Florida audience, “there is more agreement than people realize.”

To bring a Dialogue Project Team to your community, contact: Reena Bernards, 1601 Connecticut Avenue N.W., 6th Floor, Washington D.C. 20009, (202) 797-8961

—Karen Davis

If you ask Letty Cottin Pogrebin what she’s learned from her dialogues with Palestinian women, she recites five “rules.” The peace process, she says, unfortunately has not gotten as far as what to do, only what not to do. From Pogrebin’s book Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America (Crown, 1991):

Although we have not solved the big problems, at least both sides know what Reena Bernards calls “the don’t-do part”; we have learned that the win/lose strategy is what keeps Jews and Palestinians in that eternal maze, and win/win is the only way out. So we try to remember:

- Not to argue about who deserves the land more, but to agree that both peoples deserve a homeland.
- Not to argue about who suffered more, but to agree that both people have experienced a tragedy.
- Not to argue about who’s to blame, but to agree that both people have made mistakes.
- Not to argue about who has more reason to distrust, but to agree that while both peoples have reason to distrust, both need peace more.
- Not to argue about who killed more, or got killed more, but ensure that there is no more killing.

Holocaust survivor. “But after listening to you tonight, I feel as if I know what’s in your heart, and I’m leaving here loving you as a person.”

Breaking through pre-conceived hostility is one way the Dialogue Project measures its success as it reaches out to grassroots organizations across America. The group was started

creating the Dialogue Project were to bring together Jewish-American and Palestinian-American women to meet each other, discuss strategies for peace in Israel, and then make their dialogue process public. The group met privately in several emotionally intense meetings and “de-horned or de-Satanized each other” (as Ritz calls it). The

Jewish- and African-Americans

Three women museum curators have tackled an enormous project: to present the complex relationship between American Jews and African Americans during the period from slavery and arrival at Ellis Island until the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* on display at New York's Jewish Museum in collaboration with the N.A.A.C.P., highlights both conflicts and cooperation. In this capturing multi-media display of documents, photos, artwork, film clips and music

we see Abraham Joshua Heschel and Dr. Martin Luther King speaking together, Black and Jewish women labor organizers, Jews in the movie industry reinforcing racist stereotypes and a Yiddish translation of a Langston Hughes poem.

Despite the efforts of curators Adina Baack, Gretchen Sullivan Sorin and Julie Reiss to include work of women artists, writers and activists, finding women's voices in this project is a challenge. Covering nearly a century of history, the exhibit limits itself to the most visible and well-documented events which are invariably male. Cooperation or strife between Jewish women and African American women are mentioned only briefly. One



The exhibit highlights parallel experiences. Two examples shown here: A Black family arriving in Chicago, circa 1920-1930, and Jewish immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, circa 1910.



Augustus Sherman

can only imagine the fascinating stories behind the few photographs—of women from both communities

marching together in the Bronx Meat Strike in 1935 or of an African American maid and the Jewish woman she worked for. Women's issues, an area in which African American women and Jewish American women have come together to bond and to disagree are not highlighted. Because women are less visible and therefore less constricted by public pressures, women of different communities have often been able to work together more easily than our male counterparts. However the invisibility that allows the space and safety to meet also leaves historical researchers little trace of our dialogues and interactions.

Nevertheless, the exhibit reveals many forgotten intertwining experiences of Jewish and African Americans: Jews and Blacks in the Communist Party, African American soldiers liberating a Nazi concentration camp, parallels between anti-Semitic and racist caricatures in media, common uses of the Hebrew Bible, and the ideological correlations of Pan-Africanism and Zionism.

The exhibit is an important one for Jewish feminists. In the larger context of the collective memory of the people of the United States, American Jewish history, African American history and women's history are all marginalized. *Bridges and*

Gagged by Red Tape: Israeli Bureaucracy Limits Women's Access to Information on Abortion

Having heard about an Israeli Ministry of Health pamphlet on abortion supposedly available to all women, LILITH sent one of its Jerusalem correspondents to retrieve one. Little did we know that we were sending Rachel Kadish on a lengthy expedition. Welcome to typical Israeli bureaucracy:

“Clearly whoever wrote the “One nation handles the problem of abortion in an intelligent way” piece was either doing shoddy journalism or misguidedly glorifying Israel—or both. The health care system’s view of patient rights is lousy, women’s rights here are lousy, and the abortion issue is no exception on either of these fronts. Not only is the booklet you asked for not readily available—it doesn’t seem to be available at all. I made 4 calls to the Ministry of Health before I found anyone who had even heard of the booklet. I was then told that the Ministry had sent out all its copies to various hospitals so not one booklet remained to send to me (bullshit). Two hospital trips later, it seemed that there was not one chief nurse in the women’s departments who had heard of the booklet.

It’s very possible that, had I stormed into the Ministry of Health or raised a huge fuss, I would have gotten a copy. But given that I didn’t identify myself as a journalist (as far as they knew I was just some random woman on the phone asking for info about abortion) I was angry at the lack of helpfulness. I am sure the booklet exists, and I’m sure the average Israeli woman is better at bypassing the bureaucracy to get at it than I am, but I’m pretty stumped as to how to get it through “regular channels.” In any event, the article’s claim that the booklet is available in all major hospitals is 100% wrong (Hadassah Mt. Scopus had never heard of it.)

So if you still feel strongly about seeing the booklet I will do my best to go raise hell in the Ministry of Health. But if all you wanted to know was whether there had indeed been an improvement in the info readily available to women . . . here is your answer. I’ve been burning up over this one.”

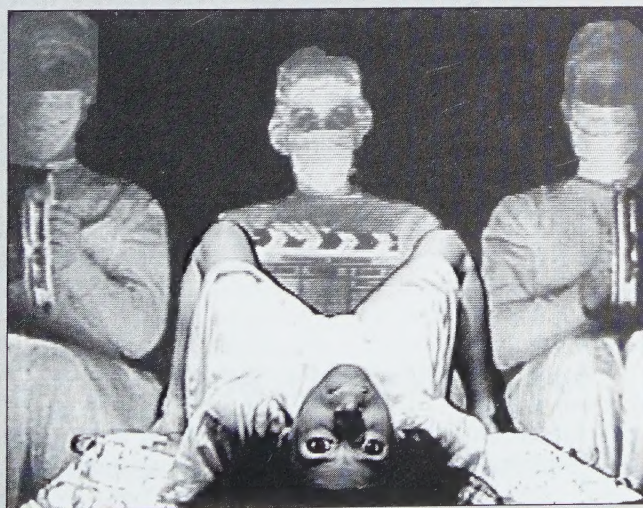


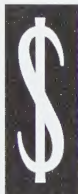
Illustration by Lisa Link

Boundaries is another way for women of both communities to hear the silences, retrieve the omissions, and inspire us to continue to work together for change.

On its two year tour, *Bridges and Boundaries* will appear at the Jewish Museum in New York City; The Jewish Museum, San Francisco; The Strong Museum, Rochester, NY; The Jewish Historical Society of Maryland, Baltimore; National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, OH; California Afro-American Museum, Los Angeles; Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum and National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia; and the Chicago Historical Society.

—Hadar Dubowsky

Feminist Philanthropy



Three women's philanthropy stories we can take as models:

- Instead of costly—and short-lived—floral centerpieces for

their annual luncheon, the Sisterhood at San Diego's Temple Beth Israel decorated tables with stacks of new books, bound with satin ribbons. The books, many of them on Jewish women's issues, were purchased by the women as a gift to the synagogue library. Likely to raise much more consciousness than even the loveliest of blossoms, this is a great idea for Bat and Bar Mitzvahs and other simchas, too.

- When the adult children of Cleveland broadcaster Rena J. Blumberg wanted to mark their mother's 50th birthday, they endowed a special program through Hillel at Brandeis University, from which Blumberg had graduated and where she served as a Trustee. Each year during Women's History Month in March, Hillel arranges an Oneg Shabbat celebration relating to Jewish women, underwritten in Blumberg's honor.

- In Baltimore, Brenda Lipitz, chair of the long-range planning committee for the national Women's Division of the Council of Jewish Federations, took matters into her own hands when she realized that male leaders often ignore or underestimate the financial contributions women make to Jewish fundraising drives. With support from private foundations, Lipitz and colleague Lee Myerhoff Hendler contracted for a detailed study of women's philanthropic giving in their community. "Anything less than a professional audit and report wouldn't be taken seriously," says Hendler. The results showed the dimensions of women's philanthropy. "Women's Divisions should *not* be eliminated," Lipitz asserts. "Women contribute twenty percent of the funds raised by the Jewish federation. Now we need to ensure that women get a voice and a leadership role with their checks."

—Susan Weidman Schneider

First International Conference on Judaism, Feminism and Psychology



"Creating a Shelter in the Wilderness"

October 29 – November 1, 1992

Seattle, Washington

Presented by the Jewish Women's Caucus of the Association for Women in Psychology

The purpose of the conference is to create a forum to explore the psychological significance of being Jewish and female.

People from all religious and ethnic backgrounds will be welcomed.

For registration material and other information contact:

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The Second Sex
and the
Palestinian Revolution



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Philippa Strum

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RED-DIAPER DAUGHTER

by Ilana Girard Singer

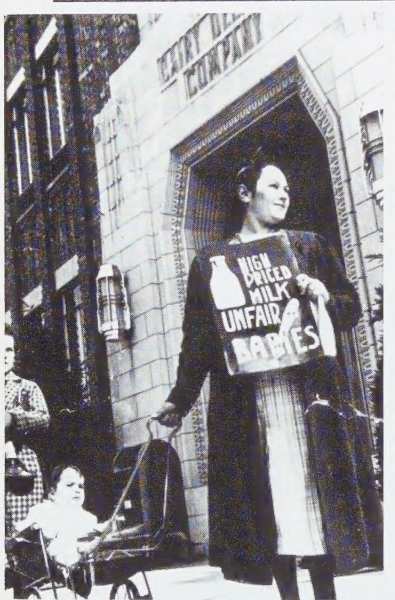


I was angry as I left my first meeting of the Jewish Professional Women's Division of the Jewish Federation. As a Jewish psychotherapist, I certainly was qualified to be a member. But when the leader started asking new members, "Which temple do you belong to?" I stepped away, offended, and didn't answer. Her question ignited an old conflict inside me.

Yes, I'm Jewish, but I don't belong to a temple—nor do I want to. My upbringing was vastly different from the women in the room, but Jewish nonetheless. I left, wondering if they'd accept me.

I return now to my childhood, the early 50's, and to Die Kindershule of San Francisco, where each Sunday children from secular, labor-class, and Communist families joined together to learn about Jewish culture. At Die Kindershule, we spoke Yiddish, sang Israeli songs, and studied the history of Jews as an oppressed people—enslaved by the Pharaohs, coerced by Spanish Inquisitors, and exterminated by the Nazis. No religion was taught, no Hebrew prayers and no Torah. We did not celebrate Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, or even hear the ram's horn. Instead, we celebrated holidays of political

freedom and emancipation such as Purim and Chanukah. We also sang message-laden songs like the Communist Youth League's *World Youth Song* that vowed to "bring peace to the earth." I held tightly to the phrase "I think as I please" from *Die gedanken sind Frei*, a 19th century German song. I thought all Jewish children sang political songs. When Pete Seeger came to Die Kindershule with his banjo, we had a hootenanny. One song he taught us about striking miners fighting the capitalist owners still repeats in my head: "Which side are you on? Which side are you on?" To me, this was being a Jew.



The author's father speaks at a street corner rally during the General Strike of 1934, when longshoremen shut down San Francisco; her mother protests high milk prices in 1937.

When I read the
local Jewish
magazines I
think, "This
doesn't have
anything to do
with me."

In Die Kindershule, we also studied American Negro history. We admired heroes like Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, and the Scottsboro Boys. The plight of oppressed Negroes became our cause. At an early age, we were politicized. In 1952, some Die Kindershule families campaigned for the Progressive Party's presidential candidate, Vincent Hallinan. The Progressive Party was endorsed by the Communist Party and also attracted labor unionists, liberal Democrats, and secular Jews. The kids from these families were my friends. Like me, some of them came from Communist families. I remember us playing hide and seek while our parents organized a fund-raising bazaar for a Communist paper, *People's World*.

I was eight in 1952 when the great Paul Robeson came to sing. As a Communist, Robeson was barred from concert halls all over the country, so several of Die Kindershule parents located a church in the Oakland ghetto for his Bay Area concert. At the church, people overflowed onto the streets—Negroes, Whites, Latinos, longshoremen, Jews and Christians.

Once inside, I waited anxiously. As Robeson was introduced, I ran to the stage and proudly handed him the roses I had brought from my mother's garden. As I listened to him sing *I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill* and *Mary Don't You Weep* I was glad I had worn my best dress and my braids criss-crossed over my head, Russian-style.

I remember Sharon, my older sister, braiding my hair and telling me, "You are a member of an important tribe; 'Levi' is a name and heritage to be proud of." She told me how my father changed his name from Leviton to Girard. Sharon was the one who told me pieces of my parents' history, a history they tried to keep secret. As a 14-year-old student, my father came from Siberia to Seattle in 1924. When his visa expired, he disappeared, surfacing in San Francisco in 1932 with his alias and becoming a political activist. One of his radical friends introduced him to my mother, a nursing student at Mt. Zion Hospital and daughter of a Canadian socialist. My idealistic, charismatic father was the perfect partner.

Sharon also told me how my father spoke to crowds during the General Strike of 1934 when longshoremen closed down San Francisco, and how my mother's classmates insulted her when they saw my father's photo on the front page of *Survey Graphic*, a Communist magazine. My mother ignored their name-calling and even demonstrated against high milk prices.

When the 1941 Alien Registration Act forced my Canadian mother to return to Canada with Sharon, then five years old, my father, stateless and a known radical, sought refuge in Mexico. Later, after my mother and Sharon had joined him, my mother became pregnant with me. To insure that I would be a U.S. citizen, she went to Los Angeles. Soon after my birth, when my father slipped across the border into California, he was arrested and sent to prison in Arizona. He was held for eight months and released into the U.S. Army, which is how he got his citizenship.

Discharged in 1946, my father came to live with us in a crowded San Francisco housing project for World War II veterans. Later on, we moved to a ranch-style house in the suburbs where my parents soon felt out of place. I remember my parents talking about the "bourgeoisie" with disdain. My little brother and I giggled at the word. "Bourgeoisie" sounded funny. But not to my parents. Our new surroundings in suburbia were "bourgeois," and a serious moral question arose. My anti-capitalist parents felt conflicted about enjoying their new comforts. But I loved the new refrigerator, the polished hardwood floors, and the blue light inside the clothes washer. Why shouldn't we have these things? My neighborhood burgeoned with families whose children had dogs, bicycles, skates, and Radio Flyer wagons. Just as Malvina Reynolds described in *Little Boxes*, the houses were "all made out of ticky tacky, and they all look[ed] just the same." Each morning fathers commuted to work and aproned mothers packed lunch boxes.

On the school playground at lunchtime, Eddie, the red-haired kid who lived across the street (son of the Chief of Police) pulled Coca-Cola and a bologna-and-mayonnaise sandwich on white Langendorf bread out of his Flash Gordon lunch box. For desert, he had Oreo

cookies and potato chips wrapped like little presents in waxed paper. My brown sack produced deviled-egg-on-black-bread sandwiches, wet and soggy, oozing through their thin paper napkin wrappings. I drank milk. My desert was carrot sticks and fruit. I didn't know then that my mother's concern for nutrition came from a history of Jewish dietary laws. For me, it was just another mark of my difference. I really wanted those white bread and mayonnaise sandwiches.

After school I sat in my father's overstuffed reading chair and stared at the bookcase. I saw authors such as Marx, Engels, Thomas Jefferson and Dante. These hard-bound volumes were unlike the *Reader's Digests* which sat on the coffee tables in my classmates' living rooms. While they and their parents watched the first black and white television sets, my father read *Scientific American* and my mother recited Walt Whitman. I read about suffering and injustice in *Sacco and Vanzetti* by Howard Fast, in *Jews Without Money* by Mike Gold and in *Ditte, Daughter of Man*, by the Danish author Martin Andersen Nexø.

But school books bored me. I skimmed the frivolous stories and fabricated answers to the comprehension questions. In doing so, I performed poorly, confusing myself, my parents, and my teacher. How could Dick and Jane stories hold my interest compared to *Sacco and Vanzetti*? This was being a Jew.

Our public school system, touted as experimental, reflected the '50's. The windows were reinforced with chicken wire. I learned what that chicken wire was for during a bomb drill. My teacher explained that when the bomb was dropped we were quickly to climb under our desks with our backs to the windows. We'd know because we would hear a siren and then see a brilliant flash. The main hazard was flying glass, but the chicken wire would stop the jagged shards. My teacher told us to cover our heads and necks with a book, a sweater, or a coat. She said covering up would protect our skin and eyes from the burning light. We were told that the great wind which would follow would gather everything into its wake, and even if we stayed on the ground, everything around us would be swirling. The kids asked, "Who drops these bombs?"

"The Russians. The Reds. The Commies!" I looked around me. Who were they accusing? Did they know my secret? With terror, I left the school yard to walk home. A car horn honked. There was my father, the Russian, the Communist, the Jew. Was he the enemy? Even so, I was glad to see him. Quietly I climbed into the front seat.

At times the fog on the San Francisco hills was so dense that headlights only reflected themselves. The way to travel was by creeping slowly behind the red taillights of the car ahead. On such an evening my family was returning from The California Labor School where my father taught anything from calculus to Leninist theory. We'd seen a Russian cartoon with English subtitles called *The Firebird*, and on the way home, I begged him to retell the story. Enveloped in the backseat by the warmth and hum of the old Buick, my brother and I snuggled and listened to the fairytale.

Suddenly, my father's voice tensed. He stopped

the story and quietly asked my mother: "Should we stop and ask them who they are and what they want? Tell them that we know they're following us? I'll make this turn, you watch to see if their headlights turn with us. Since the fog is thick enough, maybe we'll lose them on Twin Peaks." I knew to be quiet. There was danger. My stomach knotted and I shrank in closer to my brother. Being tailed by the FBI brought questions and fear. Over the years, I learned to spot the hat, the grey flannel suit, and the newspaper. The instructions not to talk to strangers and to refuse entry of anyone unknown into our house took on conspiratorial meaning. This was being a Jew.

We were always on alert, fear was great and tension constant. My father returned one evening to tell mother that their one-armed friend, Bill, had been nabbed on the street and deported to Finland. As he was arrested, Bill screamed, "Call my wife." That Sunday night my parents turned on KPFA, a new, member-sponsored radio station alleged to be operated by subversives. The commentator confirmed Bill's deportation. I shivered and looked at my parents. Could this happen to them?

The tense scene repeated itself on another Sunday when my family was listening to the latest news about the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg trial. I imagined Sing Sing Prison and myself as one of the Rosenberg sons. I was walking down the long metal corridors with the locked gates clanging behind me, determined to see my mother. I felt cold. Echoes rattled the steel bars. Were they guilty? They were Jewish; they were accused of espionage and called Communists! How could my parents be criminals? What would the executioner do to them? They were going to die and who would take care of me? My mother wiped my tears. I asked, "Who will take care of the boys? Can we?" The news report terrified me. This was the Cold War. This was being a Jew.

Die Kindershule was a haven of familiarity and safety. As the music teacher accompanied us on her accordion, we stretched our arms to catch *mayim* in the desert; we danced for rain. We swayed to *Sholom Alecheim* and our hearts kept cadence with the Yiddish *Vilna Ghetto Song*, from the World War II Jewish resistance. We sang loudly, expecting to make the world free for all mankind.

We celebrated the moral of Purim: We bow down to no man. At our carnival, complete with games, contests, theater and costumes, we cheered Queen Esther and threw darts at Haman.

Passover came. Tall and proud we stand. Moses led us to freedom and, again, we bow down to no man. To emphasize dignity and emancipation, Die Kindershule parents wrote their own Haggadah. My father assigned each child a significant part. I still remember mine:

Cease your weeping and silence your laments. They died as free men and free men need no tears. They died that the world may know that the Jew is a man among men, holding dignity and love as his birthright. I command ye, lament not but sing hosannas and songs of joy. For if a people, spat upon, cursed, and humiliated can stand up and fight knowing death to be their reward, they have found their strength...

To be alike was
to be safe. To
be different
was to be
called a traitor.

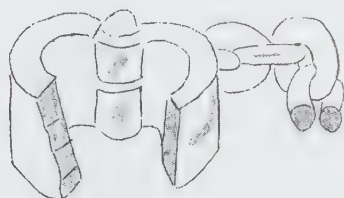
No one else had
a name like
Ilana. The
teacher
commented,
"What a pretty
name. Is it
Hawaiian?"

My allegiance to Die Kindershule was strong—but so was my need to belong to the majority. My parents did not object when Wendy, my blond-haired classmate, invited me to join the Brownies. The Brownies were different from my Kindershule cadre. The purpose of being a Brownie was to be one of the group, to do good deeds, to collect badges, and to “fly-up.” The purpose of Die Kindershule was to become a “thinker” and to “contribute to society.” That’s why the Brownie induction ceremony completely confused me. I was

when I was nine. Their spotless house was full of elegant china and fancy Victorian furniture. I loved spending many hours helping Mrs. Bullard take care of her new baby. I liked to fold the diapers and polish her silver. One day I noticed she wasn’t so friendly. She was staring at me as I was kissing her baby’s toes. Abruptly she asked, “Is your father a Communist?” My brain worked fast. Nervously, I answered, “No, he’s a progressive.” Close to tears I ran to my sister and confessed I’d given away THE SECRET. Sharon tried to

The cover of the *Die Kindershule Haggadah*, written in 1954 by Die Kindershule parents. The author’s father inscribed her copy in the upper right-hand corner with the message: “Sweet Ilana many happy pesach to you — daddy Al.”

DIE KINDERSHULE



PESACH

*Sweet Ilana
many happy
pesach to you
daddy Al*

5714—1954

blindfolded, twirled around three times, and told to look into a decorated mirror lying on the floor. I was told I would see a monkey, but I saw only myself. Still, they gave me my Brownie Pin. Was I a Monkey? A Brownie? A Jew? and a Red? How did it fit? The refrain played “Which side are you on?”

From my tree house in the eucalyptus grove, I pondered the dilemma: To be alike was to be safe. To be different was to be called a traitor. But I was tough! Of the chosen I’d come. My name, from the Bible, meant “young tree, sprouting branches.” Ilana. No one else had a name of such proportion. It was a tall name, a strong name. The suburban kids could neither spell nor pronounce it. The teacher commented, “What a pretty name, is it Hawaiian?”

My allegiance wavered when Christmas smells suffused the neighborhood and my fourth-grade classmates chatted about Jesus and Mary. I too wanted twinkling lights, a tree, and presents. My parents succumbed and we decorated a Chanukah bush to celebrate the Winter Solstice, a compromise to assimilation and safety. This was being a Jew.

I knew to keep quiet about my father’s activities. We were not to tell neighbors, school chums, or teachers about our parents’ beliefs.

I remember the family living next door

soothe me, saying we really didn’t know about our father’s politics.

Still, I waited for THE QUESTION. Classmates probed,

“What nationality are you?”

“I’m American.”

“But what nationality do you belong to?”

“I’m American.”

“You know, where are your parents from?”

The question was not childish curiosity. They were taking part in an American pastime—investigating who was “American-born,” who was a patriot, who was a traitor. In answer, I would feign ignorance or just plain lie.

And so, when I heard the leader at the Jewish Professional Women’s meeting ask, “Which temple do you belong to?,” my old fears resurfaced, as if once again classmates were testing me. But driving home, I got mad and rehearsed what I’d tell them at the next meeting: Women, I am Jewish. My history is unconventional, my experience is from outside the synagogue. But look at my life—it is based on Jewish principles and commitment. Is that not enough?

Ilana Gerard Singer is the Clinical Director, Women’s Division, at the Center for Counter-Conditioning Therapy, a non-disease mental health clinic in Oakland, CA.

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FEMINISM WITHIN ORTHODOXY

A REVOLUTION OF SMALL SIGNS

*Each new
feminist step
expands the
art of the
possible*

It goes without saying that feminism has had a powerful impact on Jewish life and community during the past three decades — but has it had an effect on Orthodoxy? ■ Contrary to the stereotypical view that nothing ever changes in the Orthodox world, contrary to the fact that feminism (traditionally) does not have the authority to reinterpret *halakha* [Jewish law], and despite the hefty pull of Orthodoxy to the right, feminism has created significant ferment and activity within Orthodoxy. The changes of the last two decades can be seen as a source of considerable hope.

by Blu Greenberg

First let us take a quick glimpse at those areas of tradition and *halakha* that have been questioned since the sixties, when the women's movement first tendered its new theology of women. Or, put another way, what exactly has Rabbinic Judaism been transmitting, generation to generation?

1 LANGUAGE. To a great extent, language of Scriptures and liturgy is non-inclusive: God is He; God is the God of our fathers; community is often addressed as men, as in "...you and your wife (wives)..."

2 LEGAL TESTIMONY. Only men may serve as witnesses in religious courts of law.

3 DIVORCE. Jewish law prescribes that the husband issue the writ of divorce [*get*] to the wife. This creates room for great mischief. A spiteful man may withhold the *get* or blackmail a woman who initiates divorce action.

4 PRAYER. In prayer groups [*minyanim*], women's presence is *halakhically* neither mandated nor recognized. Consequently, women do not participate in public liturgical roles, such as being called up to the Torah or leading the congregation in prayer.

5 LIFE CYCLE CEREMONIES. Throughout the millennia, ritual ceremonies were developed to mark the passage of males from one life stage to another. Parallel rites of passage for females have been largely absent.

6 LEARNING. The Talmud explicitly exempted women from the mitzvah of Torah study, a daily obligation for male Jews, thus creating a large gap between men's and women's learning.

7 LEADERSHIP ROLES. Tradition dictates, more by absence of discussion than by argument, the inadmissibility of women to leadership roles, rabbinic and lay alike. Not surprisingly, history has recorded very few models.

Now let's look at the recent past. To understand the global picture, it's important to examine the issues one by one.

1 LANGUAGE. Within Orthodoxy, there is virtually no discussion of language; anyone who attempts to revise inherited texts is immediately suspect of betraying the community trust. Consequently, there has been no change, not a single sacred word. This is in sharp contrast to the liberal denominations where gender-inclusive, non-sexist prayer books, for example, are becoming the norm and not the radical exception.

Still, there are signs of awareness of the power that language holds. For example, I have heard reliable off-the-record reports of a few Orthodox rabbis who, as a matter of principle, refrain from reciting the morning blessing, "*shelo asani isha*," ["...who has not made me a woman"]. They do this quietly, without fanfare, without publicly repudiating the text, but they do it with sensitivity to the issue of derogating women.

Many Orthodox rabbis now take care in their sermons and teachings to use phrases such as "he or she," and "men and women." This is in contrast to past universal use of the male pronoun as the generic term for human beings and community, and it definitely reflects new perceptions of women. Since some rabbis who are unalterably opposed to changing hallowed language nonetheless make these changes in their everyday speech, perhaps changes in liturgical language lie ahead.

2 LEGAL TESTIMONY. As the law here is explicit—only men may qualify as witnesses—this issue also has not come under review.

Does this mean that women can in no way give testimony in a religious court? Actually, it does not. For example, Israeli rabbinic courts for some time now have taken women's testimony "through the back door." In other words, the court is technically disbanded, then the "testimony" of a woman is taken. The court is then formally reconvened, and those who deliberate on the issue may use the information supplied by the woman. Currently there's an interesting development taking place in Israeli religious courts in relation to issues of family status. As of 1990, a woman who is party to a divorce proceeding has the option of bringing with her to the court an auxiliary person—a woman—to give

support and to speak on her behalf. Two eminent Orthodox rabbis are among those now training women in Israel to serve in this new capacity. This advocate is taught Talmudic family law, the rights of women under the law, and the appropriate ways of representing her charge.

Because of the fact that Conservative women rabbis have begun increasingly to serve in the formal capacity as witnesses in Jewish legal proceedings, I believe that at some point within the next decade the Orthodox rabbinate will have to deal more extensively with the formal issue of women as witnesses.

3 DIVORCE. During the past few decades, feminism has had a dual impact on the phenomenon of divorce in Western society. First, because of growing recognition that women deserve to have as much power over their personal lives as men do, any law (civil or religious) that harbors the potential for inequity is facing scrutiny. Second, there also has been a general rise in the rate of wife-initiated divorce.

In the Orthodox community, these trends play out interestingly. Since Jewish law dictates that the husband alone is empowered to give the *get*, a rise in wife-initiated divorce-action (note: this is different from actually giving the *get*) has also produced a rise in the numbers of recalcitrant husbands—that is, men who withhold the *get* for spite or blackmail. Simultaneously, there is greater community acceptance of the principle of equality in family law.

During the past 25 years, there have been six identifiable stages of response to this collision course. Developmentally, the community has moved from denial that a problem even exists; through apologetics ("Jewish divorce law is designed to protect women"); through hand-wringing (the rabbi saying, "It's a terrible problem, but what can I do?"); through attaching a *get* to civil divorce proceedings (a civil judge can incarcerate a recalcitrant husband until he complies); through using prenuptial agreements (in truth, not widely used) which effectively eliminate abuse; to the current stage — political activism. Organizations in the U.S. such as G.E.T. (Get Equal Treatment) and Agunah, and their counterparts in Israel, have raised the issue in the public eye. These groups use a variety of means: serving as intermediaries; organizing protests and sanctions against a recalcitrant husband;

and publicizing biased and unsavory acts of some religious courts. Less formal but quite effective is the activism that crops up in individual communities: a rabbi announcing from the pulpit that a man refuses to give his wife a *get*; a group of women rallying to support a friend by announcing in *shul* that none of them will go to the mikveh until she has her *get* in hand (inasmuch as *halakha* forbids resumption of sexual relations following menses until the wife immerses herself in the *mikveh*, this Lysistrata-style announcement produced immediate results); or, in the fundamentalist communities, the occasional use of physical force to help a man "decide" that he wants to give his wife a *get*. While more deserving of the term "thuggery" than activism, this latter method countervails the husband's own brand of thuggery.

Meanwhile, the grave problem of the *agunah* [woman unable to remarry because she does not have a *get*] remains. Currently, the problem is tackled on an individual basis, case by case. Caring *poskim* [religious decisors] try to find *halakhic* ways to invalidate the marriage so as to free the *agunah*. But what is now needed is to move on to the next stage: a comprehensive solution, at the level of the law, so that the potential for inequity will be eliminated and no woman will ever suffer humiliation and vulnerability at the hands of a recalcitrant husband.

4 PRAYER. What is the solution for Orthodox women who want to remain faithful to the tradition, but also experience fuller participation in communal prayer?—women's *tefila* [prayer] groups. These groups are deliberately not called women's *minyanim* (because *halakhically* women may not constitute a *minyan*), and prayers that require a *minyan* are conscientiously omitted. Rabbi Avi Weiss's defense of these groups (in his book, *Women at Prayer*) is predicated on this distinction. Still, despite all this care, detractors of all-female groups insist on calling them "women's *minyanim*."

Generally, women's *tefila* groups meet once a month—the rationale being that women want fuller expression in prayer (such as leading services, offering *divrei Torah* [Torah teachings] or sermons, cantillating from the Torah, receiving *aliyot* [getting called to the Torah to recite a blessing], celebrating meaningful passages in their lives), but

do not want to split off into separate his/her prayer communities. Women's *tefila* groups, then, are specifically a sub-community—not a break from the larger community. Although these groups exhibit none of the liturgical creativity of women's prayer groups of liberal denominations, still, their sheer existence is in itself abundantly innovative.

It must be acknowledged that women's *tefila* groups have not attracted overwhelming numbers of participants, but they are a steady force, and growing. Given the unfriendly reception they've received from traditionalists in the wider Orthodox community, this is no small feat. Several years ago, five well-known Orthodox rabbis produced a mean-spirited statement accusing women's *tefila* groups ("women's *minyanim*," in their words) of being solely radical feminist political clubs—not liturgical enterprises in the service of God. It was extraordinarily heavy censure, stopping just short of a ban. Amazingly, not only did none of the prayer groups fold under the pressure (ten years ago, they would have!), but the heavy-handedness of the criticism actually created new feminists.

In Israel, the group called Women of the Wall, which asserts the right of women to pray as a group at the sacred Western Wall, has had to handle not only censure and intimidation, but physical violence as well. After having stones and chairs thrown at them, the group has taken its case to the Israeli civil courts—an unusual place to solve *halakhic* dilemmas—and is now awaiting decision.

Another new phenomenon is that of women convening themselves as a *mezuman* (quorum of three or more) to recite grace after a meal. Though *halakhic* precedent for this does exist, custom interdicts such behavior. I remember, for example, attending a pageant prepared by the all-female students in my daughter's eleventh-grade yeshiva class. After the pageant there was a luncheon, at the close of which the principal brought in (from another part of the building) three eighth-grade boys to constitute the quorum for reciting grace. For me, the asymmetry was startling, though when I delicately raised the issue with several friends, I immediately saw the veils drop over their eyes. Recently, however, beginning self-consciously but by now matter-of-factly, groups of women have been convening their own *mezumanim*. For Amit and Emunah women (the two strongest Orthodox

women's organizations) this has become a fairly standard procedure.

Some Orthodox women have also begun reciting *kiddush*, the prayer over wine. Although the Talmud permits this, it also manages to comment parenthetically that a curse will befall any man whose wife does so. In the past, a woman reciting the *kiddush* conveyed the message that there was no man or boy in her life to fulfill this *mitzvah* for her. Though today the practice still raises eyebrows in some quarters, it is no longer considered piteous, scandalous or antinomian. At a family celebration, bat mitzvah, birth ceremony or congregational *kiddush*, Orthodox women—though not in great numbers—recite *kiddush*.

Women are also beginning other liturgical practices. For example, an occasional woman will hold aloft her own *lulav* and *etrog* in synagogue on the festival of Sukkot. Historically, women *bentsched* [blessed] *lulav* in the privacy of their homes, and only men performed this ritual in communal prayer. Women's



Barbara Ginsberg

Simchat Torah *hakafot* [rounds of carrying and dancing with the Torah scroll] exist in a number of modern Orthodox synagogues, though they generally take place outside of the sanctuary (often in the street outside the shul) with relatively few women joining in. In the home of a young Orthodox family I know, it is the learned wife who recites *havdalah*; the couple studied the sources and concluded that just as the woman must usher in the Sabbath with the lighting of candles, so she may usher it out.

5 LIFE-CYCLE CEREMONIES.

Birth. After almost four millennia, birth ceremonies for baby girls have begun to be woven into the fabric of Jewish life. They are generally celebrated at home (though large gatherings have moved, like the *bris*, to a synagogue or social hall); they usually take place within the second or third month after birth. Not yet standardized or formalized by rabbinic

Traditionally, a baby girl was "named" in the synagogue, during the first week of life, not during the central communal Torah reading of Shabbat morning, but rather at a Monday or Thursday *shakharit* [morning] or Shabbat *minkha* [afternoon] Torah reading—when there was a much smaller community presence. Today, in many modern Orthodox *shuls*, baby girls are now often named at the central liturgical moment of Torah reading—on Shabbat morning immediately preceding *mussaf* [additional Sabbath and holiday prayer].

A Jewish name is traditionally composed of a Hebrew name plus the given Hebrew name of the father (the latter becomes the child's surname). For example, Benjy Weiss's Jewish name is *Binyamin ben* (son of) *Avraham*. His sister is *Dinah bat* (daughter of) *Avraham*. In very special circumstances (such as during the prayer for healing), the mother's name is used: *Binyamin ben Sarah* or *Dinah bat Sarah*. Otherwise,

however, only the father's name is used.

During this last decade, this practice has changed. At baby namings in *shul* or at birth ceremonies (even at an occasional *bris*), both parents names are used as surnames. Women called up to the Torah in women's

tefila groups also use both parents' names. I have not yet heard of a bat mitzvah boy being called up to the Torah for his first *aliyah* with his mother's name included, but I suspect that day is not far off.

There is a custom of blessing a baby boy at his *bris* with, "May he grow to [a life of] Torah, the wedding canopy, and good deeds." For a baby girl, the traditional blessing leaves out the "Torah" part. Again, during this last decade there has been a change, and today most Orthodox Jews bless male and female babies identically—a promising indicator of changing community expectations.

Bat Mitzvah. The celebration of bat-mitzvah—relatively new to Orthodoxy—takes many different forms, though none of these includes a girl's taking a formal role in the standard community Sabbath service. The range includes: a *kiddush* in her family's home at which she delivers a *dvar Torah*; a *siyyum* [festive meal celebrating the completion of a tractate of Talmud] marking the end of her year-long study of a tractate of Mishnah; her father's being called up for an *aliyah* or chanting the Torah portion; the rabbi of the congregation addressing her at Sabbath morning services as she stands in her place; and her presenting a *dvar Torah* to the congregation gathered in *shul* for *shaleshudos* [or *seudah shlishit*, the third Sabbath meal, eaten between the afternoon and evening prayers].

But it is in the women's *tefila* groups that the celebration of bat mitzvah has truly expanded. Here a bat mitzvah might do everything a boy traditionally does: read her portion of the Torah and the *haftorah* [writings of the prophets] deliver a *dvar Torah*, and/or lead the prayers. At a recent celebration that I attended, the girl's mother led *shakharit* [morning prayers], a friend read the *haftorah*, and the bat mitzvah herself read from the Torah, delivered a *dvar Torah*, and led the *mussaf* [additional prayers]. After the prayer of *aleinu*, a dozen little girls came up to the *bimah* [podium] to lead the concluding prayers. All this was followed by a luncheon in the girl's honor.

During the first half of the dozen years of existence of the Riverdale, New York, Women's *Tefila* group, the number of 12-year-old girls who celebrated bat mitzvah could be counted on one hand. But during the last four years, there have been a handful each year. In 1992-93 (the Riverdale group's own bat mitzvah year), eight girls thus far have reserved their bat mitzvah Sabbaths. No more the shy 12-year-old sliding silently into Jewish adulthood.

Two other unique bat mitzvah celebrations stand out in my mind—one of a decade ago, the other recent. The first was a *Tu B'Shvat* seder. The young girl had spent a year with a tutor studying everything in the Talmud and Midrash regarding the trees and fruits of Israel. She and her family then compiled a *Tu B'Shvat haggadah* which she taught to the guests. A festive meal of foods and fruits of the holy land completed the



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authorities, these *simkhat bat* (the rejoicing of the daughter) ceremonies are the creation of individual families all over the country. But they all have in common a central theme—the entry of a baby girl into the covenant between God and the Jewish people. By now, many such ceremonies are widely circulating in the modern Orthodox community. I suspect the way the ritual will become a fixed part of Jewish tradition is this: An enterprising publisher of Jewish prayer books will publish one such birth ceremony in a new *siddur*. A hundred years from now, few will know whether this ceremony came "from Sinai" or not.

unusual learning experience.

On Purim of 5751 (1991), another first in Orthodox Jewish history occurred. A bat mitzvah read the Purim *megillah* for the entire congregation in the main sanctuary. According to the tradition, the *megillah* reading is the one Torah reading for which a woman reader may fulfill not only her own obligation to hear the text read, but a male's too. This young woman read all ten chapters, alternating voices from deep stentorian tones for King Ahasuerus, to gravelly ones for Haman, to a sweet soprano for Esther. *Divrei Torah* followed—her own, family members' and guests'—including several by Orthodox rabbis, among them her uncle and grandfather. The liturgical feast was followed by a culinary one. I participated with great joy, and thought about the wonderful memories that she will carry with her for the rest of her life. What a contrast to the Orthodox women of my generation. We can each recall our sweet-sixteen party, but not the day of our bat mitzvah.

Marriage. In the traditional Jewish wedding, the bride's role is a silent one, and women guests receive no participatory honors. A bride is veiled by her husband [*bedeken*]; she walks seven times around him under the wedding canopy (a tradition that I maintain is not sexist—but this explanation belongs to a longer essay); she hears the marriage declaration and accepts the ring on her index finger; and she acquires the *ketubah* [marriage contract].

I am sure that brides of the past did not feel slighted by their minimal roles—like brides everywhere, they felt themselves to be the center of the universe. Nowadays, though, some brides want more active roles for themselves and for their female friends and relatives. Here are a few new customs:

- Just before the *bedeken* [veiling], the bride's father, followed by the bride's father-in-law, places his hands over the *kallah's* [bride's] head and blesses her. I've always found this a very poignant moment, so I find it touching that some mothers are beginning to perform this rite, too.

- Women, as well as men, hold up the poles of the *huppah* [marriage canopy].

- A female guest reads the *ketubah* during the ceremony. Some rabbis will allow a woman to read only the English translation; others allow women to read the original Aramaic as well.

- Under the *huppah* the bride recites some words of love, usually taken from

the Song of Songs, or gives the groom a ring; traditionally, only the groom gives a ring. These acts, initiated by the bride, may be done only after the marriage ceremony has technically been completed (by the groom's recitation of the marriage formula, "Behold, with this ring you are consecrated unto me according to the laws of Moses and Israel"). So as to make clear that these acts are not part of the formal ritual, they are often done after the reading of the *ketubah* or at the conclusion of the ceremony. Those Orthodox rabbis who do permit brides to participate in these ways often take care to point out what is tradition and what is not.

- At a recent Orthodox wedding, right before the breaking of the glass, seven women were serially called up to the *huppah* to recite words of blessing corresponding to the *sheva berakhot*, the seven traditional wedding blessings that, moments earlier, were recited by seven male guests.

- The *kallah's tish* [bride's table] is derived from the custom of *chattan's tish* [groom's table], the pre-ceremony gathering of men (around a table set with light fare) where the groom recites words of Torah. At the first *kallah's tish* that I attended several years ago, the *d'var Torah* was delivered by the bride's sister, a teacher of Talmud.

Death. An obvious area of change involves the *kaddish*. Recited daily by men at communal prayers during the eleven months following the death of a parent (or thirty days for other members of the immediate family) the *kaddish* is a powerful healing ritual which helps a mourner move through grief in the framework of a loving community. A few Orthodox women (in contrast to many in the liberal denominations) have taken upon themselves the recitation of the daily *kaddish*. Their experiences usually run something like this: during the first few days, the regulars (i.e. men) of an Orthodox *minyan* are somewhat uncomfortable as the woman appears, and everyone shifts around a bit uneasily. Since the weekday services are usually attended only by men, and in fewer numbers than on a Shabbat, these services are often held in a small room or chapel of the synagogue, where there is no *mechitza* [partition separating men and women]. Therefore, for the first few mornings, the woman usually recites prayers and *kaddish* from the hall. Within a very few days, a *mechitza* is set up for

her, so that she need not remain out in the hall. Little by little, she becomes part of the group of regular "*minyanares*," though services will never begin until 10 men have assembled.



Few of the women who have described their experience over the course of a year have ever reported a continuing hostility towards them. On the contrary, after the initial hesitation and suspicion, a woman is generally treated graciously. By the time the eleventh month rolls around, she has become such a regular feature of the group that the men are sorry to see her leave, which inevitably she does. So far.

Altogether new is a woman's offering a *d'var Torah* at a *shiva minyan*. *Shiva* is the seven-day mourning ritual following burial, during which time mourners sit on low wooden stools in their homes, and are visited by family and friends who comfort, distract, listen, bring food, and pray with them.

At one particular *shiva minyan* not long ago, the granddaughter and granddaughter-in-law of the deceased taught Mishnah between the afternoon and evening prayers and related its verses to the life of their grandfather. The custom is to recite an additional *kaddish* after this Mishnah reading. However, since this was more than the women's father/father-in-law could handle, a compromise was reached. A male guest

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read a single verse after the two women finished their teaching, so as to give the appearance that the women's teaching was "extra," rather than fundamental; *kaddish* was then recited.

6 LEARNING. In Orthodoxy, feminism has most powerfully taken root in the study of sacred texts. There is a virtual explosion of women's learning in both the modern and ultra-Orthodox communities alike. When I was growing up—in a home in which primary emphasis was placed on Jewish education—I was never introduced directly to a page of Talmud. Today, however, young women are taught Talmud at the same early age as their brothers. Women fill honors Talmud classes in high schools (such as Ramaz in New York City), and a fair number of higher institutions of traditional learning have been created specifically for women (such as Drisha in New York, and Matan, Machon Lindenbaum, and Nishmat in Israel). Yeshiva University's Revel Graduate School and Stern College have offered Talmud study for women as far back as the 1960's.

Although Talmud study, throughout most of Jewish history, was out of bounds for women, it is now well, if not yet widely, accepted. In local communities, women manage to carve out time for regular study of Torah, Talmud and other texts. A once uncommon sight is now taken almost for granted: women walking through the streets on a Shabbat afternoon (in communities where there is an *eruv*—a boundary marker allowing Orthodox Jews to carry on the Sabbath) with a volume of Mishnah or Talmud tucked under their arms.

As the pool of women who learn enlarges, so, too, does the number of women who become teachers of Talmud and *halakha*. Remarkably, there are now a dozen or so Orthodox women around the world who have spent the last decade concentrating on advanced Talmud studies. And there are dozens more coming up through the pipelines.

7 LEADERSHIP. A discussion about learning brings us round to the subject of leadership, because the two topics are inextricably linked in Orthodoxy. It seems not at all unreasonable to make the following



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prediction: in the not-too-distant future, women in the Orthodox community will hold the title of rabbi. The meshing of two forces—on the one hand, the explosion of women's learning in Orthodoxy, and on the other, the very powerful model of women rabbis in liberal denominations—is surely going to create this effect.

I doubt that at the outset Orthodox women will serve as pulpit rabbis (the community probably won't be ready for that), but women will be ordained based on their mastery of texts. I believe we will witness this in our time because we are charted along an irreversible course: women, in significant numbers, are becoming proficient in all that qualifies a person for ordination.

Meanwhile we should note that many women have assumed lay leadership roles, now serving as officers of Orthodox synagogues, up to and including presidents—a leap from our status a generation ago when we could not even vote as members of Orthodox shuls.

Currently several women serve as executive directors of Orthodox synagogues. Some women who sit on rabbinic search committees use the opportunity to query candidates on their views of women's issues. Women serve as chairpersons and as guests of honor at yeshiva dinners. The all-male dais can now be found only in the most religiously right-wing world.

To a non-Orthodox reader, this might all seem totally inconsequential, or worse, laughable. So what if women recite a bit of Torah in public? So what if a girl stands in the women's section and the rabbi recognizes her on her bat mitzvah day? What is so remarkable about the fact that a Jewish child finally carries both mother's and father's name? Moreover, some examples I cited are nothing more than one-time episodes. These are "significant changes in Orthodoxy?"

Let me explain why I believe these changes are highly significant; indeed, nothing short of revolutionary. Though when taken item by item none is earth shaking, when measured together they add up to the redefinition of women's role in the liturgical, spiritual, and intellectual life of the community. This represents a fundamental shift from the classic assumption that women's basic dignity and religious expression is in the home.

That is why I call the impact of feminism upon Orthodoxy a "revolution of small signs." All these small steps reflect new spiritual expectations of and by Orthodox women. Each act proclaims the growing acceptance of women in public roles in Jewish life. The presumption today is that women will locate themselves in academy and synagogue, as well as in home and *mikveh*. Slowly but surely, a female presence in sacred settings is becoming normal, natural, familiar, everyday. The taboos against seeing and hearing women perform communal acts of holiness are steadily being lifted.

Another reason these small signs are so important is that this is a community that lives by precedent. Each individual experience—previously untried but now deemed to be not contrary to *halakha*—expands the art of the possible. Each "kosher" precedent, legitimate in one *halakha*-abiding community or family, can be replicated in others. One might hear, "Well, if it was permissible at that wedding, performed by Rabbi X, then perhaps we can do the same at our wedding." Or, procedurally more correct, "Let us ask Rabbi Y if we may introduce that at our wedding."

The power of a model far exceeds impassioned argument. You can have a thousand discussions on what women may or may not do, but with one real

case that has passed *halakhic* muster, the arguments are not even engaged.

Of course, it is a far slower process, these small signs. Is there anything to be said in its favor?

I believe so. If you take incremental steps, as opposed to giant ones, you feel more joined to the tradition, more continuous with it, still tied to Revelation. A sense of continuity is more than legal, it is also psychological. When there is organic change, it is experienced not as a novelty, not as opposing what came before, but rather as flowing forward smoothly throughout time, history, and community. This sense of connectedness is one of the great strengths of Orthodoxy.

Second, the cautious response of Orthodoxy enables us to monitor a broader societal issue. All of the answers about role distinctiveness are not yet in. Perhaps there is room for gender specific roles beyond biology. How do we know that a rapid blurring of all the lines might not be a blueprint for great confusion ahead? A (de facto) feminist definition of equality-as-sameness may not necessarily be most fitting to the human condition. To be sure, the very broad differences in gender roles (e.g. learning and leadership for men; family and home for women) which have limited Orthodox women certainly will have to go. Much has already fallen away. But that doesn't preclude some specific, well-defined roles and rituals for each gender.

Why ritual? Because once you acknowledge that there is value to gender-specific roles, once you affirm that it is possible to hold in harmony equality and gender distinctiveness, then finely detailed ritual is the way to do it: ultimately, it is ritual that has the capacity to take differences beyond the immediacy of interpersonal relationships to a transcendent place.

Having said that I must say the other, lest anyone confuse my defense of a measured response or justification of ritual distinctiveness with legitimization of freezing the status quo. We still have a long way to go in Orthodoxy. Inequity in divorce is outright inequity, not distinctiveness. The problem must be resolved, swiftly and in total good faith. Prayer groups deserve a better hearing; at the very least, a moratorium on suspicion and scorn. The formalization of rituals that affirm women and covenant; religious expression for experiences that are uniquely female; broader realizations

of women's aspirations to religious leadership—all of these still lie ahead.

Given that reality, why write in so sanguine a manner about the small signs? Is it not premature? I know the facts. Only yesterday was my reverie shattered in a conversation with one of the dozen women I referred to above as future Talmud scholars. After ten years of intensive Talmud study, she is switching fields. She spoke of "an uphill battle for acceptance and legitimacy in the world of Yeshiva learning...a professional dead end." Standing on the corner listening to her, I couldn't help but think that with all that scholarship and talent turned away, the heavens must be weeping.

Still, I believe there is value to singing the partial praises of feminism-in-Orthodoxy. For those who fear that change will destroy the whole system, a look at the new realities can only help to dispel their panic. Orthodoxy is flourishing, not diminishing, with the greater spiritual energy and intellect of women.

Moreover, an honest assessment of the way Orthodox feminists have gone about their business should reassure even the most implacable opponent of change. Everything has been done with total fidelity to *halakha* and its authority. *Halakha* remains as binding as ever upon women, including those who innovate. Even *agunot*, who could end their personal misery by finding recourse elsewhere, do not bolt. Their faithfulness is unfathomable.

Third, it is vital to respond to those who say no to feminist change on the grounds that it destroys the family. True, feminism has contributed somewhat to the erosion of the traditional family. But women's fuller participation in ritual and prayer, deeper immersion in the teachings of the Rabbis, and, yes, pressure for equality in divorce law to restore glory to a just religion—all of these heighten commitment and identity, which in turn strengthen the family.

Besides, the larger picture is this: equality in status, ritual, and role generates a sense of equality in a marriage; that, and not hierarchy, is what contributes to a healthy, stable family in our times.

Which brings me to my last point. How will feminism in Orthodoxy move ahead? I believe that depends largely on the wishes of Orthodox women. Currently, most of us want only to preserve the status quo. That is why

change has come so slowly, why rabbinic leaders have not felt impelled to use their powers of interpretation.

But to say that change will occur precisely in relationship to the growing and future readiness of Orthodox women is to say something glorious about the whole system. It is not a closed system as some would think, but rather a dynamic one; one that can blend tradition and contemporary values; one that can accommodate individual and group needs while maintaining the integrity of the faith system.

As feminism increasingly affects women in the Orthodox community, the process will inexorably move forward. *Halakha* will again open itself to interpretation, and we will see within it a definition of equality, as well as of distinctiveness of male and female, that will carry us faithfully forward into the next four thousand years of Jewish life.

Blu Greenberg is the author of *A Special Kind of Mother* (Atara Publishing, 1992) and is currently editing a book on *mikveh*. This article will be adapted for her forthcoming book, *Jewish Women: A Time of Transition* (Jewish Publication Society, 1993).

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Legajo 162:

Toledo (Inquisición de)

Judaizantes

Script on this page: Above: The "title" page of the trial, in the old medieval stenographic script: First, on left, upper, it says, "The Inquisition of the city of Toledo." Upper right, "Judaizers" — those accused of being secret Jews. Below: "Isabel Lopez, resident of Cogolludo, wife of Francisco de Murcia. "Su causa — Relajada." This means, "The verdict of her case is: Relaxed." An obvious euphemism, "relaxed" means executed, burned at the stake. Because the church is forbidden to take human life, someone found guilty is handed over (or "relaxed") to the secular arm of the government, to be put to death. And because of the Biblical injunction against "spilling blood," executions are bloodless — hence, burning at the stake. "1516-1518." This is the duration of the trial.

Isabel Lopez vecinda de Cogolludo
y mujer de Francisco de Murcia

Su causa
1516 = 1518

Relajada

The Rediscovered Case of Isabel Lopez, Burned at the Stake November 30, 1518

The Spanish Inquisition [1480-1608] conducted approximately 300,000 trials of suspected secret Jews; Isabel Lopez's trial was just one of them. The documents which describe these myriad trials are largely lost, having been destroyed by an enraged populace at the end of the Inquisition. Still, 6000 or so transcripts of trials are extant, scattered throughout the great public libraries of Europe and America. Written in a stylized medieval Spanish stenography, they are decipherable only by scholars. By far the largest collection of transcripts—including Isabel Lopez's story of 94 pages—is stored in the National Archives at Madrid. Claudia Wise worked from transliterations into Spanish done by Renee Levine Melammed (author of the unpublished dissertation, "Women in Spanish Crypto-Judaism 1492-1520"), using scores of eyewitness testimonies to piece together the life and conduct of Isabel Lopez.

"My name is Ysabel . . . I am a New Christian, converted from Judaism twenty-four years ago." The notary of the Spanish Inquisition recorded these words on October 20, 1516 in the City of Toledo. His handwritten account became File 162, one of the many secret documents of the Spanish Inquisition.

Isabel Lopez stood before the Lord Inquisitors—all priests—after having suffered forty-one days of

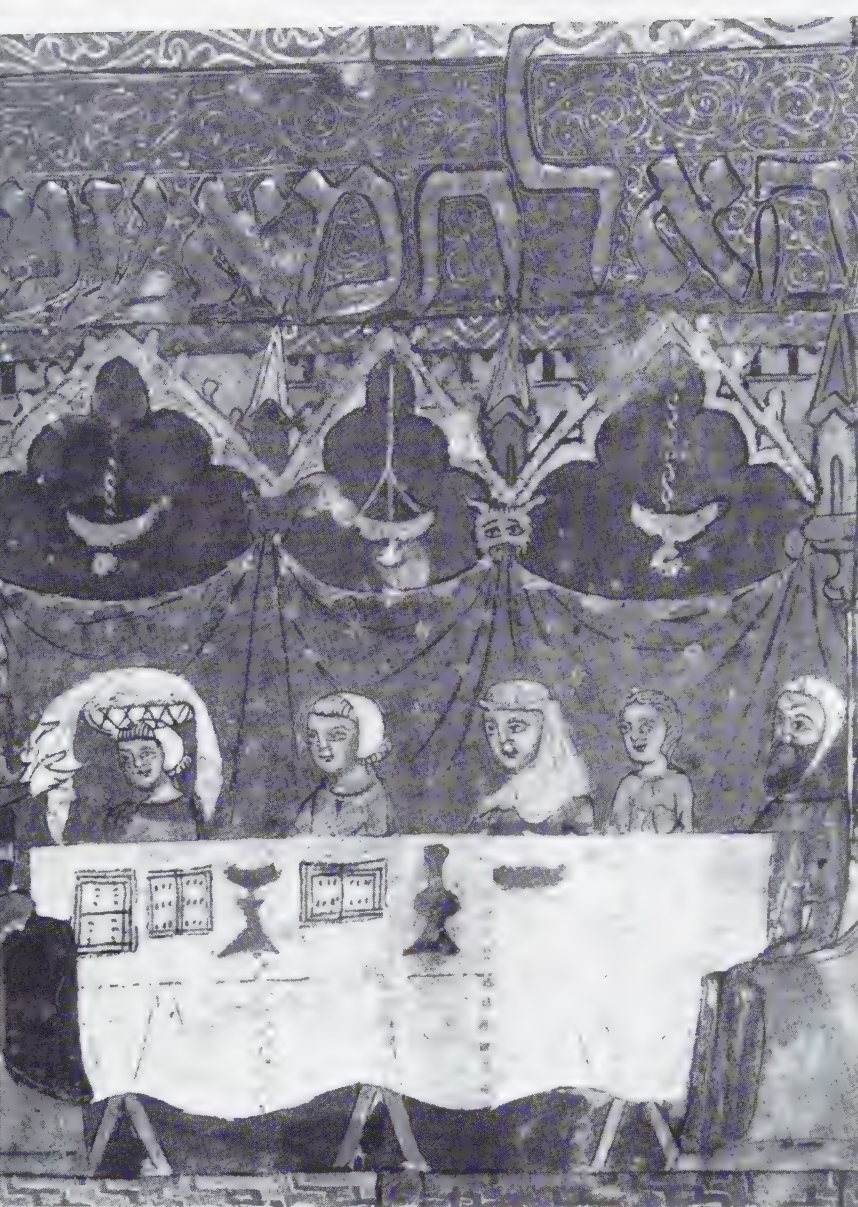
imprisonment away from her husband and young children, not knowing what charges had been brought against her. Alone and afraid, afraid for herself, afraid for those not yet arrested, Isabel had waited for her ordeal to begin. She had been isolated from all the other prisoners, including her mother.

Isabel had been summarily removed from her well-to-do family life late in the summer, shortly after the Inquisition came to town. In standard fashion—like a heinous travelling circus—preachers employed by the travelling court arrived to do advance work, stirring up the population with sermons denouncing heresy, including intimate (and instructive) descriptions of what "closet" Jews might be found to do in the privacy of their own homes. After the clergy sowed these malevolent seeds of fear and suspicion, the Inquisitors arrived, ready to accept confessions and accusations.

The Inquisitor General, Father Tomas de Torquemada (a single individual who, like Hitler, had obsessions so relentless that they fueled an entire country), sometimes preached his own fire-and-brimstone sermon in a village, and required attendance by all. Torquemada urgently warned New Christians who had committed heresy and treason—that is, who had in any way practiced anything Jewish—to confess.

If New Christians admitted their crimes early and willingly, perhaps also beneficently supplying the names of other lapsed Christians, their punishments

by Claudia Wise with Susan Schnur



Women at a Passover seder, from a Spanish Haggadah 1350-60. Before the beginning of the Inquisition in the 1480's, the Jews of Spain were free to practice their religion openly. Afterward, servants or neighbors could — and did — report any suspicious religious activity of Conversos or "New Christians" to Church authorities.

varied—but were guaranteed to be less irrevocable than death. If they confessed after a conviction, they earned themselves a “good” death: quick and merciful strangulation before being burned publicly at the stake [the *quemadero*]. If, like Isabel, they insisted on their innocence to the end, they were often first tortured, and then delivered to the ghastly pain of conscious cremation. Death at the stake was a bloodless execution, an important point to the secular arm of the government which was prohibited by the morally sensitive Church from spilling blood.

Blood, in fact, was an obsession all around, responsible, in many paradoxical ways, for the tragedies of the Inquisition. Spanish Christians (like later Germans) had developed a cult of racial purity (*limpieza de sangre*, “clean blood”) which handicapped New Christians as they tried to compete economically and socially with Old Christians. Since Jewish conversions were often mistrusted (for good reason, since Jews had generally converted under threats to life, livelihood and/or of exile), racial theories helped keep up the boundaries between who was authentic and who questionable. Many unusual laws speak to these racial-religious compulsions: for example, it was prohibited

for Jewish wet nurses to nurse Christian babies—Jewishness could perhaps be transmitted in breast milk.

Jews, for their part, had their own extreme concern with blood. Animals had to be slaughtered ritually, salted, and then soaked in water in order to drain away all blood; Jewish aversion to blood bordered on the phobic as Jewish women underwent ritual immersions in order to purify themselves after monthly menstruation. Maintaining these rituals naturally made crypto-Jews visible and vulnerable, if only to their non-Jewish maids who were in a unique position to observe them at home. All in all, blood was a mysterious and powerful force which was feared and respected by medieval Jew and Christian alike. Blood defined who one was, influenced what one did, distinguished piety and social eminence. Blood was hard to change.

In any case, Isabel Lopez remained silent, not only through all the preliminary stages of Inquisitorial advance work, but later as well (after she was denounced), through the initial stages of her actual trial. It's possible, of course, that Isabel was in truth a believing Christian (having been converted as a small child); during torture she apparently cried out only to Jesus. And it had, indeed, been twenty-four long years since Isabel and her parents converted, after rushing, like thousands of Jews, into the port town of Cartagena in a desperate scramble to leave Spain forever.

The Lopez family, like all Spanish Jews in 1492, were given four months in which to choose either exile (with the stipulation that they could not take anything of value with them), or Christianity. The latter choice entitled one to become part of the *Converso*, or converts, class, a social caste which had increased significantly in response to the Edict of Expulsion. Either choice, of course, implied a leap into the unknown. In any case, by July, 1492, there was not a single Jew left in all of Spain.

Isabel's young parents, two among thousands, in tumult and urgency chose (or, just as likely were forced into) baptism. Together with their first-born, the three assumed new identities: the father (Abraham) becoming Pedro (after Peter the Apostle), the mother, Maria (after Jesus' mother), and the child, Isabel, after the Catholic Queen herself, co-author of the Edict of Expulsion. The family returned to its small village, and Pedro resumed his prestigious position as tax collector, which afforded him wealth as well as authority (and some hostility) in his community. Tax collectors had traditionally been Jewish; now the office very often went to *Conversos*—the connection perpetuated the sense that *Conversos* were basically Jews.

Through the following years Pedro and Maria had three more children, all born and baptized as Christians. It seems probable that the boys were well educated, and so were the girls (this was rare). Pedro had a critical role in the building of an elegant local ducal palace (considered one of the jewels of the Renaissance, today under government restoration). The household was

maintained by a large staff of maids drawn from the local countryside.

Isabel, the eldest daughter, grew up to marry Francisco de Murcia, also a Converso and a shopkeeper. In the rigid social hierarchy of late medieval Spain, "shopkeeper" fell much below the prestigious position that Isabel had occupied as the daughter of the tax collector, friend of the aristocracy. It's likely that Francisco offered great wealth to compensate for his lack of social status.

Isabel's one sister, Catalina, fared much better in marriage than did Isabel, possibly because she was a born, not a converted, Christian. She married an aristocrat—an *hidalgo* (a "son of someone," contracted from "*hijo de algo*"). *Hidalgos* had full Christian blood. Catalina's husband was a lord-in-waiting to a member of the local ducal family. Through her marriage, Catalina moved away from the Jewish heritage of her parents and older sister, assimilating successfully into Old Christian society. The Inquisition didn't go after her.

Of Isabel's two brothers, the older had married while the younger remained single—at least until the Inquisitors lost interest in the Lopez family. In any case, the younger son's prospects for marriage were certainly radically altered by the Inquisition's scrutiny.

To go back to the summer of 1516, the Inquisitorial team arrived in Isabel's village, and the advance guard clergy began their sermonizing against Judaizers. A typical sermon ran as follows:

*If you know or have heard of anyone who keeps the Sabbath according to the law of Moses, putting on clean sheets and other new garments, and putting clean cloths on the table and clean sheets on the bed on feast-days in honor of the Sabbath, and using no lights from Friday evening onwards; or if they have purified the meat they are to eat by bleeding it in water; or have cut the throats of cattle or birds they are eating, uttering certain words and covering the blood with earth; or have eaten meat in Lent and on other days forbidden by Holy Mother Church; or have fasted the great fast [Yom Kippur], going barefooted that day; or if they say Jewish prayers, at night begging forgiveness of each other, the parents placing their hands on the heads of their children without making the sign of the cross or saying anything but, "Be blessed by God and by me;" or if they bless the table in the Jewish way; or if they recite the psalms without the Gloria Patri; or if any woman keeps forty days after childbirth without entering a church; or if they circumcise their children or give them Jewish names; or if after baptism they wash the place where the oil and chrism was put; or if anyone on his deathbed turns to the wall to die, and when he is dead they wash him with hot water, shaving the hair off all parts of his body. . . [from Henry Kamen's *Inquisition And Society in Spain*, Indiana U. Press, 1985].*

Such sermons not only prepared the way for the arrival of the Holy Tribunal itself—creating a climate for the denunciation of Conversos—but they also ironically helped preserve the very rituals that the Inquisition was committed to stamping out.

Next the Inquisitors arrived, followed by a formal "period of grace" during which crypto-Jews could come forward on their own. Isabel and her parents remained silent but watchful. At the same time, they trusted that their privileged social position would protect them. Within days the period of grace was over, and informers were urged to come forward.

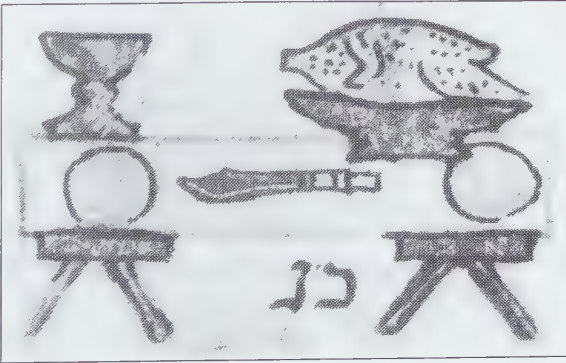
Five informers emerged to denounce Isabel, her husband and her parents, and their testimonies inadvertently referred to other Conversos, casting the net even wider. The informers' identities were kept secret from Isabel and her family throughout the course of the trials.

The first witness was a woman named Catalina de Cervantes. She said that eight years ago a housemaid named Mari, now deceased, had lived with Isabel and her



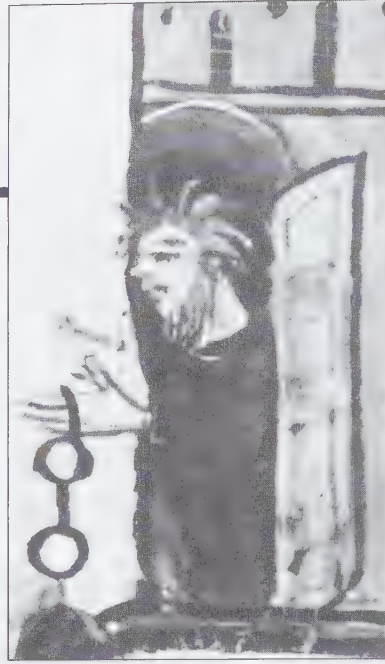
Though most Jewish traditions survived the Inquisition, sadly, men's cooking dinner is one practice that seems to have been lost.

These illustrations show Jewish domestic life in Spain in the 14th Century. Homely artifacts and routine cooking and cleaning procedures provided evidence the local populace used in testifying that alleged converts to Catholicism were still "secret Jews."





(Left) A Spanish Jew being thrown into prison in Aragon, after 1350.



(Right) A Spanish Jewish prisoner, c.1350, unkempt and unshaven but freed from his shackles; his liberty was the result either of unexpected clemency or of the payment of a fee. Imprisonment was often a means used to force a community to pay large ransoms.

husband. One day Catalina had asked her friend Mari, "Tell me, how did those *tornadizos* ['turncoats'] you worked for live?" Mari then reported that she had seen Francisco and Isabel get dressed up on Saturdays and go into a special room where they would pray, raising and lowering their heads, and that they would not leave their house on Saturdays, even though they were all dressed.

The second witness was a blacksmith and trader. He said that twelve years ago, more or less, he went into the kitchen of Isabel's parents where he saw Isabel with a leg of meat in her hands. She was cutting the meat along the side and removing the fat with her fingernails. Then she cooked it. Asked if there was any enmity between himself and the accused, he answered, "No, before we were friends."

Witness number three was another former housemaid, named Madalena, who'd lived with Isabel's parents some thirteen years ago. Madalena said she had never seen her employers eat or cook pork, rabbit, eel or octopus. The Converso family used to cut all the fat from meat and then take something out of the animal's leg—Madalena could not remember what. Sometimes Isabel's father did this, sometimes one of Isabel's brothers, sometimes Isabel's husband, cutting the meat and taking this thing out. Madalena said that the family used to ask her to leave the house when they ate this meat. When the Inquisitors asked her if there was any enmity between herself and the accused, she replied, "No."

Next came Maria, the twenty-year-old daughter of a shepherd who'd lived as a maid with Isabel, her

Writing a Book: First You Hear Voices

Three years ago, as a hard-working and serious-minded graduate student of comparative religion, I came across these 16th-Century trial transcripts of the Converso Isabel Lopez. I never wanted to study this particularly cruel and depressing period of history—actually, I avoided the subject of Jewish suffering and anti-Semitism (irrational hatred threatening my sense of my own safe, beautiful world), yet I found myself drawn to this woman's fate.

The facts of the trial upset me, even disturbed my sleep. I'm far from crazy and I don't hear voices, but Isabel—and even more so her seven-year-old daughter—emerged from the historical material, intruding into my life. As I moved from working on my thesis to writing my book about Isabel Lopez, I started to "hear" Isabel's daughter talking with me, as I went about my life, running errands, doing research, lying awake in bed:

"My mother was taken away by the Inquisition; my voice is the voice of a wounded child. Like a peacock crying, I haunt your nightmares and startle you awake. You want to tell my mother's story, resurrect her old bones? Just save us from becoming lifeless data, keep my mother from being one number more or less in the statistics of the Spanish Inquisition. We lived once, my mother, my family and I. We lived and breathed and loved and prayed.

I was seven when my mother was arrested, just an innocent child, playful and enthusiastic. Two years later, after it was over and my mother was a handful of ash, I was already old. Tell my mother's story for me, even if you don't have all the answers, even if you can't make sense of it all, you safe, comfortable woman with your life and health and your own daughter; you student with the luxury to study other peoples' lives. These forty-seven pages of my mother's trial do not satisfy your search for spirituality, that other luxury you enjoy; they disturb your thoughts about God and meaning.

I'm not sure I truly appreciated my mother's strength and her need to answer the Inquisitors with silence. I was young then and afraid for myself, not realizing how important it was that she be strong and careful in her replies. Worry about us because it is your nature, but don't worry about us; it's beyond your understanding.

You have a document to go by. Forty-seven pages are all that remains of my family. Read this document carefully, read and re-read, and I will meet you there . . . between the lines.

—Claudia Wise

husband, and her children three years ago. She reiterated having seen *kashrut* observed, and, like the other informers, reported having witnessed (without having understood) the removal of the sciatic nerve. Isabel's husband, said Maria, tested the sharpness of his knife with his fingernail before slaughtering poultry. Isabel would not cook pork, but would cook garbanzo beans and onions. Though the family did cook eel, it was only for the maids to eat, not for the Conversos. When asked about enmity between herself and the accused, she replied in the negative, saying that she was only discharging her conscience.

Two years later—Isabel being in jail this whole time, her possessions all confiscated, her children beyond contact—a final witness, another Madalena, emerged, claiming that she'd been away when the Inquisitors had been in town, and so didn't know about the trials. Madalena reported living as a maid with Isabel's parents five years earlier and seeing a cellar where the family had hanging lamps which they used to light on Friday afternoons. They would not extinguish these lamps, but would just let them burn out by themselves. The Converso family went into this cellar for two or three hours with the door closed; Madalena did not know what they did in there, but they dressed up as for a feast day. On Friday and Saturday afternoons, but not on Sundays or any other days of the week, the family dressed up. Madalena said it was her job to clean the little oil lamps and put new wicks in. She reported, like the others, the observance of *kashrut*—when Isabel and her mother baked, they would take a lump of dough the size of an egg and throw it in the oven; they tried to hide what they were doing, but Madalena saw. She also saw the meat-washing, three or four separate washings until the meat was white and the water clear. No, she said, there was no enmity.

Meanwhile, Isabel, in her audience with the Inquisitors, said that she did not know why she'd been arrested. She was told that there were accusations against her of heresy and apostasy. She was admonished to confess entirely all that she had said and done against the Holy Catholic faith; she was to admit that she followed the Laws of the Jews. As a Catholic, she was promised compassion and pity for her confession and repentance.

Properly warned, Isabel rushed into a confession: "... It must have been seven years ago, more or less, that I had a sick daughter who was one or two months old at the time. And I took her out into the country to a farmer, I think her name was Juana, she was a woman of the evil-eye, and she bathed my daughter's forehead and then my child recovered."

Two audiences with the Inquisitors followed, Isabel was again admonished to confess and repent, but, even in the face of the Inquisitor's total silence, she courageously stayed with her original confession—a single experience with witchcraft and superstition.

Assisted by attorneys and her family, Isabel

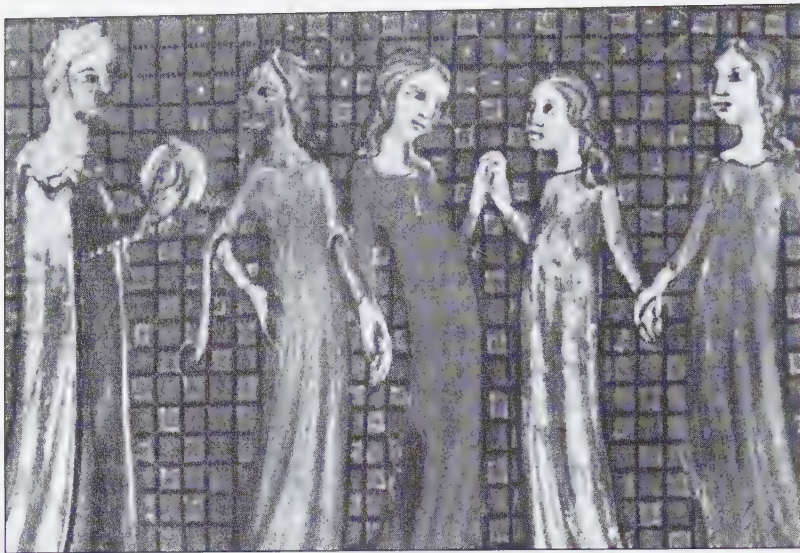


Traditional Jewish mourning rituals, like other customs and religious observances of Spanish Jews, were practiced in the open until the last quarter of the 15th Century, when the Grand Inquisitor forced all Jews to convert to Christianity or be exiled. We don't know what happened to the remains of Isabel Lopez or other Jews burned at the stake.

launched a complex defense, trying to prove that she was a sincere Catholic, bringing forward the town's most religiously pious residents (and also its nobility) to affirm her Christian standing. Her attorneys tried to argue that there was mortal enmity between Isabel and her informers—hatred sufficient to motivate the latter into false accusations. In the torture chamber, tied upside down on ladder-like devices while quarts of water were poured into her inverted throat so that she couldn't breathe (many drowned this way), she still clung to her innocence, saying she had no accomplices to name, crying out, "Oh Mother of God, Lady of Guadalupe, Jesus Christ, I am coming to my end . . . already I have told the truth."

Nevertheless she was charged with everything: "cooking Jewish stews," "refusing to eat rabbit," "covering up heretical acts," "perjuring herself," "taking communion without fully confessing her sins or telling what she knew about herself and others." All of her wealth was confiscated to the Crown of Spain; her children (and their descendants through the third generation) prohibited from holding public office, wearing gold, silk, pearls or precious stones, carrying arms or riding horseback, becoming lawyers, physicians, surgeons, or, in any other way, attaining any honors or high office.

She was found guilty of spreading the Converso heresy by encouraging others to commit acts of "Judaizing;" of insulting the sanctity of the Holy Catholic faith by taking confession with a false heart—her duplicity, said the prosecutor, jeopardized the internal security of Spain itself. Isabel Lopez, stated the Inquisitor, was a dangerous woman. She was also a source of wealth to the State Treasury, and, indirectly, to the selfsame Holy Tribunal.



Jewish girls from Aragon dancing, c.1350-60. Holding hands in a line, they improvise steps and figures to the rhythm of a small drum.

Meanwhile, her mother was found guilty and burned at the stake, and her father (tried later) found less guilty—he confessed to Judaizing—and allowed to live.

On November 30, 1518, in the city of Toledo, in the great public church ceremony of an *auto-da-fe*, among

those sentenced to bloodless execution at the *quemadero* (burning alive at the stake) was one Isabel Lopez: married woman; grown daughter; mother of small children; baptized (unlike her Christian-born siblings) over a quarter-century earlier; married not to an aristocratic Christian-blooded *hidalgo*—a “son of someone” (like her younger sister Catalina), but to Francisco de Murcia, just another Converso who also, many years earlier as a little child, forehead still damp with baptismal water, stepped forward into his new identity, one among many thousands.

Claudia Wise, who lives near Seattle, is working on a book about Isabel Lopez. Illustrations are from *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, by Therese and Mendel Metzger (Chartwell Books, 1982), reprinted with permission of William Konecky Associates.

Feminist Hermeneutics: Them “R” Us

I converted to Judaism the month before our first child was born. It was easy to walk away from my Protestant upbringing; it was superficial. We never talked about faith or God at home—they were such embarrassing subjects. Even today my mother says she doesn’t go to church because it only raises more questions.

When I became engrossed, to my utter surprise, in the 16th-Century case of Converso Isabel Lopez, I realized that it wasn’t so much that I related to her as a wife, mother and religious convert, but that I understood how hard it is to change.

I had not realized how important my Christian traditions were to me until years after I had given them up. I thought I could reason my way out of Christianity and into Judaism, but I had not counted on some deeply held feelings. I had left out my need to share my birthright traditions with my children, and that outstanding Christian childhood experience of Christmas morning.

Every year at Christmas/Chanukah I struggled with an inner conflict that worried my children and erupted into arguments with my husband. We lit the menorah not just to ape Christmas but to affirm our pride in Judaism’s ability to resist Hellenism. We chanted the Hebrew blessings and gave presents. But still Christmas held its spell over me. (Perhaps my desire to honor Judaism’s resistance to religious confiscation had also a private, unconscious meaning for me in terms of my need to find the courage to be true to myself.) Last year, finally, things changed.

Our family celebrated Christmas: a decorated tree, lights, presents to give and to receive. A secular event that was important for me in that I was finally able to share some of the happiest moments of my childhood with my own children and husband. It was an enormous relief to listen to my inner clock that had been set so long ago for December 25.

I could satisfy my emotional needs and let go of the intellectual. It felt good even if it didn’t make a lot of sense. I felt liberated and validated as a whole person with a legitimate childhood. Despite my being a committed Jew, Christmas morning was a deeply satisfying experience of family solidarity. It’s hard to change and it’s hard to give up family traditions; and I was finding out I didn’t have to.

And so back to Isabel Lopez. Throughout her trial she appeared as a sincere Catholic—the court notary documented, word for word, her cries to Jesus to save her as she was bound and tortured. On the verge of death, it was to Jesus she cried. But was she, really, a “secret Jew”—whatever complicated thing that means? Did she, as her informers reported, *kasher* her meat, pray in the basement, light Sabbath lamps?

Religion and identity are clearly much more intricate than either the Inquisition or most contemporary religious assumptions can tolerate. “Being” is a process, not one particularly intense moment. And for some of us, God and faith are also a process, rather than a leap of faith made once and forever.

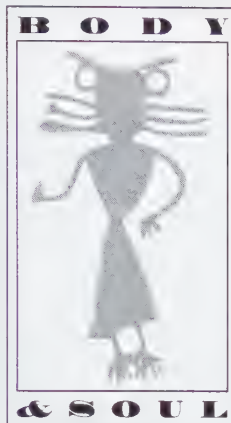
I see the tremendous courage and complexity of Isabel, and I feel myself drawn to rescue the life events of this “simple” housewife who was such an extraordinary woman. Isabel’s story, after all, validates and brings light to my own story, while my own story moves me to try to validate and bring light to hers.

— C.W.

RU-486

the other fight for abortion rights

by Sharon Lieberman and
Andrea Boroff Eagen



At a time when the very legality of abortion is in serious peril, it may seem unnecessary to stretch pro-choice energies any further by fighting for the availability of a pill offering a non-surgical (medical) abortion alternative. RU-486, the French abortifacient pill, is not available to American women because abortion opponents have successfully intimidated and threatened U.S. legislators and bureaucrats.

Developed over two decades primarily by researchers at the French pharmaceutical company Roussel-Uclaf, RU-486 was officially approved by the French Ministry of Health in 1988. The corporate politics of the drug's development are convoluted, and resistance to its abortifacient use came even from within the company. Roussel is owned in part by the French government; however, the majority shareholder is the Hoechst Corporation of (former) West Germany, the successor company to I.G. Farben, which produced lethal gas for Hitler's death camps. Hoechst's president, a practicing Catholic and an opponent of abortion, initially feared possible "death pill" accusations against RU-486. (Indeed, Roussel withdrew it from the market under pressure from the French religious right, then bowed to a government edict that allows stringently controlled use.) More practically, American opposition to the pill could hamper Hoechst's U.S. sales of their medical products to Catholic hospitals—one third of all U.S. hospital beds.

Anti-abortion groups of all degrees of extremism are working to block the importation of RU-486 into this country and to prevent domestic testing, manufacture, and marketing. The National Right-to-Life Committee and the more extreme American Life League have each supported legislation that would affect new drug application and product liability restrictions. Their initial strident attitude, which peaked with a delegation sent to Europe to meet with pharmaceutical executives, has become a post-card campaign directed at legislators.

The American Life League has published a 70-page booklet, *RU-486: The Human Pesticide*, valuable for the depth of its research but laughable (and alarming) for the hysteria of its language. Interestingly, the A.L.L. argues that RU-486 is simply another in a long line of inadequately tested, dangerous substances that have been

foisted on women. The concerns are legitimate, and are shared by activists in the women's health movement (who previously have brought attention to careless distribution of D.E.S., oral contraceptives and I.U.D.'s). However, this fresh claim by anti-choice groups—concern for women's health—clearly is disingenuous.

The American Jewish Congress' March 1992 biennial convention endorsed U.S. research and testing of RU-486, citing its "significant medical and public health gain in terms of safety, efficacy, ease of use, cost, and privacy." However, cost and privacy remain ambiguous. The use of RU-486 as an abortifacient requires close medical supervision, tethering a woman to a provider for four visits. Can this be less expensive than the average

cost (\$250) of early surgical abortion? Further, we are many years away from home abortions; the drug gives women an alternative to surgical abortion, but privatizing it does not mean that political opposition to abortion will abate.

Beyond abortion, RU-486 represents a new class of drugs with potential for treating progesterone-dependent breast cancer, endometriosis, and adrenal cortex disorder; it may also potentially provide a means of non-sex-hormone fertility control. These drugs are a genuine breakthrough.

Currently, there is an import alert on RU-486; it may not be brought into this country for any reason. But support for lifting the ban comes from a broad spectrum of women's, religious, medical, and population control organizations. There are two federal bills pending that would lift the import alert: S-2268, sponsored by Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA) and HR-875, sponsored by Representative Ron Wyden (D-OR). Individuals or groups who would like to have their voices heard can contact: The Reproductive Health Technologies Project, 1601 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 801, Washington D.C., 20009, or phone (202) 328-2200 for a packet of information on actions in support of RU-486.

Sharon Lieberman, a *LILITH* contributing editor, holds a graduate degree in health sciences. She is a consultant and writer on women's health issues in Evanston, IL. Andrea Boroff Eagen is a science writer and book author in Brooklyn, NY. Both are longtime activists in the feminist women's health movement.

How RU-486 Works

RU-486, a steroid called mifepristone, blocks uterine cells receptive to progesterone, the body's natural hormone that maintains a pregnancy. Without progesterone, implantation or early gestation is spontaneously blighted. The embryo is expelled with a subsequent dose of a prostaglandin (a fatty acid that stimulates smooth muscle). RU-486 alone has about a 60% effectiveness rate. In combination with a prostaglandin, the rate is 96%, providing a complete abortion without major complications. Vacuum aspiration, the current surgical procedure for early abortions (9-12 weeks), has a 98% rate.

RU-486 must be administered within 49 days of the last menstrual period, a very narrow window of effectiveness. The best candidate for using RU-486 would likely be a physically mature woman, familiar with her body, knowledgeable about the physiology of reproduction, and sure of her decision to end her pregnancy.

HOT SPRINGS MIKVEH

BY MARNA SAPSOWITZ

Ronda and Donna had been studying with me for a full year, in preparation for conversion. The time had come to formalize their commitment to Judaism, and so we talked about mikveh [the ritual bath], about what it signified, and about what the options were.

There's a mikveh near Seattle (60 miles away), maintained by the Orthodox community. We non-Orthodox rabbis are allowed to use it for our conversions, but not without unpleasant hassles each time. Neither Ronda nor Donna particularly wanted to use the "official" mikveh, and I, frankly, supported them in that decision. To me, traditional mikvehs smack of the idea of menstrual impurity — a concept I find distasteful. I also dislike feeling that I need to be on my "best behavior" so that the Orthodox don't revoke non-Orthodox privileges (which has happened in the past), and I resent as well what I consider to be the extortionist fee charged for mikveh use.

Since Donna and Ronda are both outdoorsy types, lovers of nature, we discussed more "natural" options. Lakes, rivers, the ocean all sounded good, but would be COLD at this time of year. Besides, we needed a place secluded enough to guarantee us privacy for naked immersion. What to do?

Brainstorming, it suddenly came to us: a hot spring! Here in the Pacific Northwest we are blessed with an abundance of natural wonders; one of the most wondrous is hot springs. Water bubbles out of the earth, pre-heated, natural . . . and acceptable as a kosher mikveh. What could be more perfect?

Ronda did the research. A number of possibilities had to be eliminated—many of the hot springs have been developed into spas or resorts. Those wouldn't work. Others,

Above, left to right:
Donna Albert, Rabbi Marna Sapsowitz,
Ronda Friedman.

THE NATURAL WONDERS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST: WATER BUBBLES OUT
OF THE EARTH, PRE-HEATED, NATURAL . . . AND ACCEPTABLE AS A KOSHER
MIKVEH. WHAT COULD BE MORE PERFECT?

tragically, have been so overused and so irresponsibly used that they've become virtual cesspools. (So one of the forest rangers told Ronda.)

Finally, after countless phone calls, Ronda found what sounded like the perfect place: Goldmyer Hotsprings (it even sounded Jewish!). Maintained by a group called the Northwest Wilderness Foundation, only twenty people per day are allowed into the area. There were no reservations at all for the day we wanted to go; we could have it all to ourselves.

The directions sounded pretty straightforward: Twenty-two miles down a dirt road (we would, of course, borrow a four-wheel drive), then wade across a stream, find a path on the other side and follow it up to the hot spring. But when we got to the stream—perhaps wadable in August—it was, in late May, a rushing, ice-cold torrent. Absolutely uncrossable. We despaired. Still, having come all this way, we weren't going to give up that easily. Downstream a ways was a large tree that had fallen across the river. We bushwhacked down, and, holding on for dear life, slid across. (Actually, Donna walked across; Ronda and I weren't so daring.) Thoroughly covered with mud, we found our way back upstream to where we could pick up the trail to the spring.

The spring made it all worthwhile. The water comes out of the earth inside a cave with a high, arched ceiling . . . inside the cave lies a steaming pool . . . then the water spills out into a smaller, rock-lined pool, just outside the cave's entrance, and, from there, into a larger pool. Each pool is successively a little cooler than the one above it, as the water is chilled by the much cooler air. All sit on the side of a cliff, overlooking a cascading waterfall.

By this time we were all hyperventilating, so we stripped and plunged in, soaking for a while in utter bliss. (So much for rabbinic distance and dignity!) Then I got out, dressed, and Donna and Ronda each immersed and said the *brachot* [blessings]. We had done what we came there to do. Indeed a memorable mikveh experience. One that Ronda and Donna—and I—will not forget.

Back home, on *erev* Shavuot [the eve of the holiday], we convened the traditional *beit din* [religious "court"], and the two brand-new Jews-by-Choice read from the Book of Ruth (in Hebrew as well as English) and talked about their odysseys into Judaism. It was beautiful and moving. As a gift, I had T-shirts made for them. On the front, they say: THE MIKVEH AT GOLDMYER HOTSPRINGS. On the back: I DUNKED.

Marna Sapsowitz is rabbi of Temple Beth Hatfiloh in Olympia, Washington.



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THE BODY POLITIC

The Positive Woman is a new bimonthly magazine for women who test positive for HIV. It is a forum for those affected by the disease to express their opinions and to evaluate current services, legislation and the social impact of HIV/AIDS. *The Positive Woman, Inc.* P.O. Box 33061, Washington DC 20033-0061, (202) 898-0372.

WHAM! Frontlines is the newsletter of the Women's Health Action and Mobilization, an organization committed to "demanding, securing and defending absolute reproductive freedom and quality health care for all women." *WHAM, P.O. Box 733, New York, NY 10019, (212) 713-5966.*

Women & Recovery covers AIDS, alcohol, co-dependence, depression, drugs, eating disorders, incest, mental health, and physical abuse with news items, projects, publications, recovery services, and a calendar of events. 12 issues for \$18 plus postage (\$3 for bulk mail, \$4 for first class, \$8 for Canada, \$12 for other foreign) from *Women To Women Communications, P.O. Box 161775, Cupertino, CA 95016, (408) 865-0472.*

The Jewish Survivors' Network has already published two issues of its newsletter and has a small but growing membership of Jewish survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The organization, whose goals are the prevention and the healing of those who have been abused, needs funds to sustain its activities. Until non-profit tax exempt status is confirmed, make contributions payable to director Mindy Adelman and note that the money is to go to JSN. An acknowledgment receipt will be sent. Become a member and receive their newsletter: *JSN, P.O. Box 1566, Philadelphia, PA 19105.*

ARTS MEDIA

Tarbut: Israeli Cultural Affairs in North America is a quarterly newsletter on the arts, listing music, dance, literature, art, events for children, and background articles. Free from *Department of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel in New York, 800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017.*

And the Women Danced—Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership is a national juried exhibition and part of an effort to develop images of the changing leadership in Judaism as women have joined the rabbinate. Slated for March 1993, the exhibition is open to professional artists in any visual medium. Jurors are Philadelphia artists and critics; three cash prizes. *Rabbi Sharon Stiefel, Jewish Women's Studies Project, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Church Road and Greenwood Avenue, Wyncote, PA 19095.*

TELL YOUR STORY

How can our Biblical mothers, Deena and Tamar, act as role models for Jewish women survivors of rape and incest? A group of rabbinical students are editing a book on Jewish feminist spirituality, highlighting biblical mothers as archetypes of our life experiences. Send stories, midrashim, poetry, songs, rituals (requesting anonymity if you wish) to *Gila Rayzel Raphael, 6357 Wayne, #B4, Philadelphia, PA 19144.*

Holocaust children orphaned and later adopted — share your stories on film. *Beverly Post, 60 Pineapple Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201, (718) 237-0961 (collect).*

Red Diaper Daughters raised in politically active (socialist, communist, progressive) households in the 1930's-50's, send essays, memoirs, short prose or poetry with SASE for a book

by Red Diaper Daughters: *Ilana Girard Singer, R-D Project, 262 Scenic Avenue, Piedmont, CA 94611-3417.*



Members of the Family: A Century of Companion Animal Portraits will be a 60-photo traveling exhibit at the I.B. Singer Center to be established in Tel Aviv. Concern for Helping Animals in Israel seeks photos demonstrating a loving bond between people and animals. Deadline: October 31, 1992. Separate categories for children and adults. Details: *CHAI, P.O. Box 3341, Alexandria, VA 22302, (703) 658-9650*

For a guidebook for Jews by choice: if you're considering conversion, have already converted, or are a rabbi who deals extensively with converts, contact *Lawrence J. Epstein, Suffolk Community College, English Department, 533 College Road, Selden, NY 11784.*

The first national online database of research-in-progress on women is here! Access and contribute to new research and resources to describe and improve women's lives. *The National Council for Research on Women, Debra Schultz, 47-49 East 65th St., New York, NY 10021, (212) 570-5004.*

Acknowledge, grieve, and heal from infertility or pregnancy loss: for a new anthology send poems, journal writing, sketches, prayers rituals, and art to *Bonnie and Laurie Baron, 7494 Rainswept Lane, San Diego, CA 92119, (619) 461-4120.*

Bay Area home movies portraying northern California's Jewish community, organizations, institutions, businesses, Jewish family life, life-cycle rituals, and synagogue activities are sought for a film and sound archive of Jewish communities in the western United States. Contact *Elizabeth Friedman, Judah Magnes Museum, 2911 Russell Street, Berkeley, CA 94705.*

CELEBRATE

The Harvard Hillel Sabbath Songbook includes music and lyrics in Hebrew and Yiddish with transliteration and translations by students. Illustrated and indexed. 270 pages. \$28.00 hardcover, \$18 softcover. *Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel, 74 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138.*

Book a Jewish storyteller at your next event or be listed in their directory if you tell stories yourself. The Jewish Storytelling Directory is available from *The Jewish Storytelling Center, 92nd Street YM-YWHA Library, 1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10128, Peninnah Schram, Director, (212) 415-5544*

Musicians, mimes, clowns, and performing artists recently emigrated from Russia are available to entertain at your next event: *Alice K. Adesman, Director, Cultural Arts Program, New York Association for New Americans, mail to: 111 Fifth Avenue, 17 Battery Place, New York, NY 10004, (212) 387-7090.*

San Francisco Jewish human rights group offers a way to share greetings for a sweet New Year while supporting the human

rights and welfare of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees. Sanctuary theme Rosh Hashanah cards, 8 for \$12.00 from *San Francisco Jewish Sanctuary Coalition*, P.O. Box 411391, San Francisco, CA 94141-1391 (415) 282-2636.

GATHER TOGETHER

Women's Voices: An Examination of the Status of Women in Israel Today. Meet Israeli journalists, academics, and advocates and learn about women's political voice, involvement in the peace movement, and organizations that deal with violence against women. One-week study tour in Israel, November 1992. Contact *Susan Bandler*, *New Israel Fund*, 111 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018, (212) 302-0066.

Mingle and browse at the next biennial Jerusalem International Book Fair (April 18-23, 1993). Applications are being accepted for a fellowship program to recognize talented younger editors from the United States and Europe. Deadline: October 1, 1992. Applications: *Michal Meryn*, *Jerusalem International Book Fair*, c/o Israel Trade Center, 350 Fifth Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10181, (212) 744-2818.

Jewish Women and Their Worlds: Making a Difference, the second Texas Jewish Feminist Conference will take place October 23-25, 1992. Keynoters include Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Susannah Heschel, and Irena Klepfisz. Chaired by LILITH fiction editor Julia Wolf Mazow. *American Jewish Committee*, 3336 Richmond Avenue, #303, Houston, TX 77098, (713) 524-1133.

POLITICS —'92 & BEYOND

The Women's 1992 Voting Guide by the Women's Political Action Group, makes it easy to understand issues and choose candidates who support women's interests in areas such as sexual harassment, abortion rights, health insurance, medical research, pay equity, child

support, child care, rape, breast cancer, domestic violence, and family leave; 96 pages, \$3.95. A percentage of the profits from sales will go to selected women's organizations. In your local bookstore or \$5.00 (includes shipping) from *Earth Works Press*, 1400 Shattuck Avenue, #25, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Fundraising goal: 50 female senators. Not a moment too soon. Send money to continue twenty years of work advancing the role of women in political leadership to the *Center for the American Woman and Politics*, *Eagleton Institute of Politics*, *Rutgers University*, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (908) 828-2210, *Ruth B. Mandel*, Director.

Help save choice. Contribute to the National Council of Jewish Women's Choice Campaign, which is working to influence public opinion with printed materials, public forums, letters to the editor, press statements, a telegram bank to public officials, speeches, rallies and community advocacy. *NCJW*, 53 West 23rd Street, New York, NY 10010.

Fight Operation Rescue. Contribute to the goal of raising \$50,000 to continue the pro-choice fight against Operation Rescue's abortion clinic picketing campaigns. *NOW Legal Defense & Education Fund*, P.O. Box 96775, Washington DC 20090-6775.

SEPHARDIC CELEBRATIONS

Our Story: The Jews of Sepharad is a series of special publications from the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education: *Celebrations and Stories* describes variations in the way Judeo-Spanish, Spanish-Portuguese, Moroccan, Syrian, and Ashkenazi Jews celebrate holidays and life-cycle events; a section of stories includes *Dona Gracia Nasi Mendes*. *You are the Historian* is aimed at elementary and middle schools. *Two Traditions—One People* is designed for teens and adults. *CAJE*, 261 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001.

Visit Jewish South America.

Tour Argentina and Brazil with scholar Lily Blank, executive director of Venezuela's Confederation of Jewish Organizations. Meet Sephardim and Ashkenazim and study the political position of Jews in South America. August 12-24. *Gratz College*, Old York Rd. and Melrose Ave., Melrose Park, PA 19126, (215) 635-7300.

Sephardic Roots? Go to Spain, Turkey, and Greece with an option to visit Israel and Morocco. *International Costa Tours*, 733 Third Avenue, #2101, New York, NY 10017, or *American Sephardi Federation*,

133 East 58th Street, New York, NY 10011.

Three short film portraits of Sephardic women from Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey: *Nana: A Portrait*, directed by Jamil Simon; *I Miss the Sun*, by Mary Halawani, and *Trees Cry for Rain: A Sephardic Journey*, by Bonnie Burt, are being offered in special programs by the *Jewish Film Festival*, 2600 Tenth Street #102, Berkeley, CA 94710 (510) 548-0556. A Jewish Film Festival will be presented in Madrid, Spain, October 10-17, and a catalog offers more details.

—compiled by Naomi Danis

TZEDAKA



Sneakers provided by Chai Chodesh

Sponsor a needy Israeli child for \$18 a month through a Vermont-based organization which meets the needs of children often overlooked by larger charities, providing music lessons, wheelchairs, books, camp tuition for handicapped children, and sneakers for children from Ethiopia. The organization works closely with existing social agencies in Israel. Sponsors receive an annual report about the children, but without the children's names. *Sue T. Barasch*, *Chai Chodesh*, Route 1, Box 2570, Plainfield, VT 05667, (802) 454-7717.

Research in breast cancer prevention may be the most important study that the Strang Cancer Prevention Center has undertaken since it introduced the Pap Test for the early detection of cervical cancer more than 50 years ago. *Strang*, 28 East 72nd Street, New York, NY 10021 (212) 794-4900.

Help fund community screenings for potential donors of bone marrow. Call for the dates and locations of future drives. For Jews with potentially fatal blood diseases, the best chances of tissue matches are people of Jewish ethnic origin. With a simple blood test you can join the National Marrow Donor Registry and you might be able to save one of the 9,000 people desperately awaiting this living gift of life. Tens of thousands of individuals must be typed in community screenings at a cost of millions of dollars. Send tax-deductible checks to *Friends of Jay Feinberg*, P.O. Box 326, W.O.B., West Orange, NJ 07052. 1-800-9-MARROW.

Myself Surprised— at becoming a

JEWISH VEGETARIAN

by Roberta Kalechofsky

Like most Eastern European Jews, my Jewish roots were intertwined with Jewish culinary traditions. *Shabbos* meant challah baked by

Bubbie, chicken soup, and meat *cholent*. On summer Friday nights, when windows were open, the entire neighborhood smelled of *Shabbos* cooking. Every Jewish holiday had its own particular smells and tastes. The Jewish calendar is a calendar of the senses—not only of historical moments. Like most others in my wider culture, Jew or non-Jew, I regarded vegetarians with bemused tolerance and wondered what you fed them. The break with my culinary heritage occurred when I began to learn about meat containing DES, the sex hormone that causes vaginal cancer in women and breast development in young boys. I had two pubescent sons at the time.

My first cautious change was to announce that our family would “cut down on meat.” My concern was the health of my children, not of the planet. At that point I didn’t know of the relationship between meat and environmental decay (cattle-grazing leads to soil erosion and desert-like conditions); of the possible public health danger caused by meat production (half of all antibiotics made in the U.S. are used to promote growth in cattle, thus unnecessarily increasing the possibility that

resistant strains of bacteria will develop); or of the dreadful modern cruelty of turning a cow into a hamburger—kosher or not. Like most of my friends, I vaguely believed that if you didn’t eat meat your bones and brains weakened and your husband courted impotence. I started to make a distinction between “modern meat” (the title of an influential book by Orville Schell), which was bad for you, and “good meat”—the kind without hormones or chemicals. I blindly trusted that kosher meat—which I used exclusively—was good meat, not only free of additives but also of cruelty.

Then I happened upon *Judaism and Vegetarianism* by Richard Schwartz (Micah Publications, 1988) with its dreadful descriptions of “factory farming,” including exactly how veal calves are confined and how chickens are kept in cages the size of shoe boxes. When I soon thereafter asked my butcher where my meat came from, he understood the rising ethical and health import of my question. “Mrs. K.,” he said sympathetically, “all meat for the commercial market is raised the same way. We just kill the animal differently.” Suddenly, *shekhita*, [kosher slaughter], which I had always viewed as having distinct respect for animal life, took on a different cast. If a baby cow is tormented by being confined to a crate nearly the size of its own body, made to live in darkness and lie in its own excrement, then its entire life becomes a slow dying. So much for the humanitarian, quick, and painless death of *shekhita*.

I slowly gave up meat-eating, though I still held to the “meat myth.” I remember looking at a large poster with the caption, “Meat Builds Strength,” in a butcher shop. Years of socialization had me believing that

canard still, though a vegetarian friend of mine consistently reminded me that the strongest animals, such as the bull, ox, elephant, and horse, are herbivores. I began to understand vegetarianism as a truth struggling throughout history—against a profound propaganda pitch—to be told. I began to feel that Jewish vegetarianism recaptured the spirit of the first law of *kashrut* in *Genesis*: “See I give you every herb, seed, and green thing to eat. These shall be yours for food.” Decidedly not Bubbie’s chicken.

People frequently ask me, “Why Jewish vegetarianism? Vegetarian is vegetarian!” The answer is that Judaism traditionally and historically has been steeped in dietary ethics, and not just in the celebration of eating. There is a dietary tradition in Judaism which is far older than chicken soup or meat *cholent*. For example, our messianic tradition rests upon our becoming vegetarians again (as we were in Eden); there is no blessing for the eating of meat, and “meat is never included among the staple diet of the children of Israel” (*Encyclopedia Judaica*). The traditional biblical era diet consists of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey, according to Deuteronomy 8:8.

When I realized that I could no longer celebrate Pesach with a shankbone on the table, I believed that what was true for me must be true for other Jews as well. Hence, I published the *Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb*. Two years ago, a woman called me from a small town about a hundred and fifty miles from Tokyo to order a copy of the haggadah. “My goodness,” I gasped, “how many Jews can there be where you live?” She responded across ten thousand miles,

Roberta Kalechofsky, Ph.D., is a writer, publisher, and lecturer, and founder of Jews for Animal Rights. She is also the founder of Micah Publications.

"I'm the only Jew out here, but I happen to be a vegetarian."

During Talmudic times, the rabbis discouraged Jews from becoming vegetarians, despite the earlier, strong vegetarian undercurrents in Judaism. They did so because vegetarianism, at that time,

JEWISH VEGETARIAN RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS:

Jewish Vegetarians of North America:

Established in 1983 as a support group for Jewish vegetarians, with chapters throughout the U.S. and Canada; \$24 membership (\$26 for families) includes a quarterly newsletter as well as membership in the *International Jewish Vegetarian and Ecological Society*, based in London. You will also receive the society's quarterly international magazine, *The Jewish Vegetarian*. Contact: Jewish Vegetarians, 6938 Reliance Rd., Federalsburg, MD, 21203.

Jews for Animal Rights / Micah Publications:

Dedicated to promoting Jewish ethics as they relate to the treatment of animals. Contact: 255 Humphrey St., Marblehead, MA, 01945.

BOOKS:

Richard Schwartz, *Judaism and*

Vegetarianism, Micah Publications, 1988.

Louis Berman, *Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition*, Ktav, 1982.

Roberta Kalechofsky, *Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb* (a vegetarian and egalitarian Haggadah), Micah Publications, 1988.

Rose Friedman, *Jewish Vegetarian Cooking*, Thorsons Press, England, 1985. (Available in U.S. through Micah Publications or Harper/Collins.)

AND BEYOND:

CHAI-Concerned for Helping Animals in

Israel: Established in 1984 to help the Israeli animal welfare community improve the conditions and treatment of domestic animals (those not protected by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel) in Israel. Contact: Nina Natelson, Box 3341, Alexandria, VA, 22003.

The ECO-Kosher Project: Created to "encourage institutions and individuals to make purchases and investments and use resources in accord with a Jewishly rooted and defined ethic of social responsibility—in particular, responsibility for the environment." Contact: Institute for Jewish Renewal, 7318 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, PA, 19119.

Shomrey Adamah: A Jewish environmentalist group at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Contact: Ellen Bernstein, Church Road and Greenwood Ave., Wyncote, PA, 19095.

Feminists for Animal Rights: Works to raise the consciousness of the feminist community, the animal rights community, and the public at large about the links between the objectification, exploitation, and abuse of women and of animals in patriarchal society. Membership costs from \$12-20/yr. (based on a sliding scale) and includes a twice-yearly newsletter. For more information send SASE to: PO Box 694, Cathedral Station, NY, NY, 10025-0694.

was associated with asceticism and celibacy. However, modern Jewish vegetarianism has nothing to do with ancient ascetic cults; it remains true to the Jewish tradition of celebrating of life, health, food, and festivity. We celebrate our holidays with some vegetarian foods that are distinctly Jewish. Below is Rose Friedman's recipe (from *Jewish Vegetarian Cooking*) for a *cholent* with *knaidels* that rivals my Bubbie's meat *cholent*.

With the *cholent* and soup, serve challah, wine, nuts, dates, candles and song. You have a vegetarian *Shabbos* that tastes as good as the *Shabbos* of your childhood. The Jewish tradition enjoins us to make *Shabbos* a joyful occasion; therefore we should have foods we love and wines we enjoy, both of which are amply possible with a vegetarian meal based on the original biblical diet of "the grain, the wine, and the oil." □

Cholent with Knaidels

1 large onion, finely chopped

Vegetable oil

1 1/2 cups lima beans soaked overnight and rinsed

1 cup barley, rinsed

2 tablespoons whole wheat flour

1 teaspoon paprika

Sea salt, freshly ground pepper, garlic salt

2 large potatoes, peeled, thickly sliced

Hot vegetable stock to cover (use bouillon cubes)

1. Fry onion in a little oil until light brown.
2. Place onions, beans, and barley in the bottom of an ovenproof casserole with a tight fitting lid.
3. Mix together the flour and seasonings and add to the casserole, covering the beans, barley, and onions. Mix well.
4. Cover with potatoes, season with salt and pepper.
5. Pour vegetable stock into casserole to cover everything.
6. Cover with lid and cook in oven at 350 for about 45 minutes.
7. In meantime, make *knaidels*:

1 cup whole wheat flour

1/2 cup whole wheat semolina

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1/3 cup polyunsaturated margarine

2 tablespoons grated onion, lightly sauteed in oil

1 finely grated potato

1 teaspoon chopped parsley

1 egg (optional)

1 teaspoon yeast extract

4 tablespoons cold water

1. Combine the flour, semolina, and seasonings and rub in margarine.
2. Add sauteed onion, grated potato, parsley, egg (if using), yeast extract, and enough cold water to make a soft mixture.
3. Form into dumplings about the size of golf balls.
4. Remove casserole from oven and place dumplings on top of the mixture.
5. Add more vegetable stock up to the level of the dumplings, and replace lid.
6. Leave in a slow oven (250) overnight, or all day until required.
7. If you prefer not to make dumplings, remember to cook the rest of the *cholent* slowly, anyway. I myself have an alternative to chicken soup (called "better-than-chicken-soup soup") which is incredibly easy to make:

Better-than-Chicken-Soup Soup

1 pound of yellow split peas

1 cup grated carrots

1 cup grated parsnips

2 fresh bay leaves

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Rinse split peas and bring to a boil in 8 cups of water.
2. Simmer one half hour and add rest of ingredients.
3. Season to taste and cook for an additional half hour.

THE UMBRELLA TREE (Penguin, 1990, \$6.95) by Rose Zwi recasts as fiction the anguish and despair in the lives of black South Africans during the 1970's. In a poignant description of their daily struggles, Zwi explores the relationship between blacks and whites against a backdrop of oppression and misunderstanding. Freda ("after fifty years in Africa...I still count in Yiddish") draws on her understanding of anti-Semitism to build a coalition between blacks and whites. The demise of the relationship between her son, Tony ("Jewish, intellectual, passionate and politically committed") and Louise, a white Afrikaaner, serves as a metaphor for the impending Soweto riots of 1976 which are the culmination of the book. Despite a limp story line and stereotypical characterizations, this novella has a powerful message.

A LIBERAL EDUCATION (Fithian Press, 1991, \$10.95). In ten evocative semi-autobiographical stories, octogenarian Sara S. Ruffner recounts the life of teenager Sandy Stern, the daughter of a poor Jewish family in New York during the Depression. In real life, Ruffner, who grew up in an assimilated home, divorced her non-Jewish husband 22 years ago and then decided it was time to learn and write more about her own culture and history. It is easy to recognize the familiar characters that Sandy encounters in student life at Hunter College, social life at the Catskills, and in the day-to-day struggles of her neighborhood. "First Love" is a delightful tale about adolescence; in "Delicatessen" a loveless marriage makes Sandy resolve to finish her college education and ensure her future independence.

THE GLOBAL ANTHOLOGY OF JEWISH WOMEN WRITERS (Micah Publications, 1990, \$14.95) includes more than thirty essays, stories, poems, personal insights, and commentaries from celebrated women, including Emma Goldman and Cynthia Ozick. The sections are linked thematically under titles including "emerging," "I take shape on the loom of history," and "on the waves of revolution."

Selections range from "Bread Givers," by Anzia Yezierska (published in 1925), to Australian writers Fay Zwicky and Nancy Keesing, who provide a view of Jewish women from Down Under, to



Spanish writers Angelina Muniz-Haberman, Luisa Futoransky and Nora Glickman, who write about Polaca — the Jewish prostitute in Latin America. Nadine Gordimer and Shirley Espaka convey, with their Jewish consciences, the struggles of South Africa.

A CEREMONIES SAMPLER edited by Elizabeth Resnick Levine (*Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education*, 1991, \$9.95) brings together twenty-two innovative rituals for Jewish women. Included are pregnancy, birth, and mothering; healing and leave-taking; maturation and milestones; and holiday celebrations. There is a Chanukah ritual that emphasizes the role of women; an invitation to women to visit the sukkah [*ushpizin*]; and rituals for losses including separation from close friends, hysterectomy, divorce, and death. Some of the ideas may seem awfully esoteric (e.g. a ceremony for becoming a vegetarian), others may help women generate their own personal rituals.

In **TRADITION IN A ROOTLESS WORLD** (University of California Press, 1991, \$24.95), Lynn Davidman has written a sensitive account of *ba'alot teshuvah* — "returnees" (Jewish secular women who become Orthodox). Davidman juxtaposes life at the Lubavitch woman's seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota with Manhattan's modern Orthodox Lincoln Square Synagogue. Inquisitive and non-judgmental, Davidman explores the lives of women in these two communities, trying to understand their dramatic embrace of Orthodoxy. Intertwined with each personal story is an analysis of broader social stresses—such as sexuality and career choices—and of the psychological stability of some *ba'alot teshuvah*. In general, Davidman presents a positive, although not naive, picture of religious communities and

the "empty spaces" they are able to fill in some women's lives.

From England, **GENERATIONS OF MEMORIES**, written by the Jewish Women in London Group (*Women's Press*, 1989), shares 44 life stories (eight of them presented at length) originally developed from oral testimonies. The common thread is that all the women are first- or second-generation immigrants to England, having come from Eastern Europe, Israel, Italy, Persia, and South Africa. Diverse in age, class, religious observance, sexual preference and politics, these women help us appreciate the complexity and special nuances of English Jewry. The story of Rita Altman (born in 1922 in Germany, arriving in England just before World War II) was the most resonant for me. Her loneliness and struggle to reconcile old world and new felt abidingly familiar.

Faye Moskowitz's **AND THE BRIDGE IS LOVE** (Beacon Press, 1991, \$17.95), is a collection of non-fiction essays about life in Michigan during the Depression. Drawing on the constant alienation she experienced growing up as a Jew in a non-Jewish area, Moskowitz shares the intimate details of her family's intergenerational conflicts. In a series of vignettes, enchanting in their simplicity, Moskowitz stays close to the emotional bone, most pointedly when she



Faye Moskowitz

writes about her daughter's impending marriage.

"Six weeks before the wedding, when the time came for out-of-town invitations to be sent, my depression deepened once more," she writes. "I felt as if I were publishing the news of my failure as a Jewish parent." If I had only done this or that differently, I reasoned, my daughter would not now be marrying a gentile."

Using memory, which, she writes, "can chalk in childhood with the pastels of nostalgia — or cut like whiplash into the face of sentimentality," Moskowitz's stories chart her own maturation and growing positive feelings about her Jewish identity.

HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN: THE LOST TRADITION OF THE MATRIARCHS

By Savina J. Teubal. Harper&Row, 1990, \$15.95.

In her imaginative and provocative work *Hagar the Egyptian*, Savina J. Teubal claims that the stories we have learned for generations about our foremothers may not only be incomplete, but may mask truths about powerful matriarchs in a culture that attributed a deep magic to the religious experiences of women. "As I see it, the voice of prophecy has been frozen in history," says Teubal of our extant biblical text. Yet according to a number of modern scholars, this was not always so. "The voice in the wilderness is female also," Teubal asserts.

One of Teubal's claims is that Hagar, first mentioned in Genesis 16:1 as mother of Ishmael and cast off into the desert by Abraham, father of her son, was *not* Sarah's devalued servant or Abraham's concubine as most interpretations suggest. Rather Teubal portrays Hagar as a matriarch with a deep relationship with Sarah and a spiritual life of her own. Investigating the possible matriarchal customs of the biblical era, Teubal posits a new Sarah-Hagar story that differs radically from the one we have always known.

Teubal claims that Sarah as priestess may have personified religious/sexual rites with Abimelech, making Isaac the son of the

local king rather than of Abraham. In Teubal's argument, this makes Abraham the father of *neither* Isaac nor Ishmael, as Ishmael's lineage is attributed to a third woman, the unnamed Desert Matriarch who has visions in the wilderness, rather than to Hagar. Teubal argues, in fact, that biblical figures traced their lineage through female rather than male lines. Indeed one of the most striking features of Teubal's presentation is a biblical "family tree" in which the names of the *women* are in boldface, while the names of Abraham and Isaac appear in lighter print as incidental figures. For a reader with a traditional religious background, this chart alone makes *Hagar* an inspiration.

Teubal's scholarship is nothing if not thorough, and includes illuminating discussions of possible mistranslations of Hebrew words in the Hagar passages. Yet while Teubal's work is inspiring as creative mythology, it has flaws as an accessible scholarly work. The material is appealing to anyone who has ever bridled at traditional interpretations of the Bible, but Teubal assumes too great a knowledge of biblical scholarship on the part of the reader. She draws conclusions boldly, sprinkling her text with phrases like "obviously" and "must be interpreted as," when her arguments, at least to this layperson, often don't seem obvious. A basic familiarity with the biblical texts may still leave the

reader, for all her efforts, choosing between abandoning Teubal's arguments or taking Teubal's word for it and reading on.

But if the lack of clear explanation is a disappointment, the implications of Teubal's research offer tantalizing possibilities. Teubal challenges our assumptions about the matriarch/handmaid relationship, and describes the various gods, male and female, that existed in a time that many would have us believe was monotheistic. *Hagar* is punctuated by maps detailing the routes travelled by the matriarchs and by photographs of archaeological finds. These include Biblical period statues of goddess figures and of women helping each other give birth, pointing towards a powerful tradition of women's strength and unity. Tracing what she claims is redactors' deliberate distortion of originally matriarchal narratives, Teubal makes our matriarchs more than shadows, and it is thrilling to see the existing material on biblical women gathered together in one place. Hagar emerges if not as a clear three-dimensional figure, then as an intriguing one, a new center around which we may construct legends. And that, after all, is where it all begins...

—Rachel Kadish

WOMANWORDS: A DICTIONARY OF WORDS ABOUT WOMEN

By Jane Mills. Free Press, 1992, \$22.95.

Mills takes a scholarly, entertaining and feminist look at the etymology of 300 words relating to women, including some selections that lend themselves distressingly to compartmentalization: Woman as container ("dish," "bag," "honeypot," "vessel"); woman as edible ("cherry," "cheesecake," "tart"); and woman as animal ("hen," "pussy," "bitch," and "shrew"). Over time, many words perambulate from having positive meanings that pertain to males to having pejorative ones that refer to women. Once a word is associated with females, it is unlikely to be used again for men—except in contempt (see, for example, "wimp").

Besides the obvious fact that language both reflects and creates our misogynist social reality, Mills speaks to the issue of semantic reclamation. Language can be used "in the struggle against patriarchy," she writes, citing the positive roots of many now-negative distaff words which feminists might work to revive affirmatively. "Definitions are not static," she reminds us. "Understanding our language is the first step to reforming it so that it will no longer insult or exclude women."

A nice little weapon for the bookshelf.

—Susan Schnur

Come Chelm or High Water



MALKAH the artist

In Chelm, I wanted to be an artist. This was not allowed. I had no paints so I drew but not with a pencil — no, with a stick in the mud on the banks of our river. One day my brothers found me there. They broke my sticks and stamped on my work. Then they warned me not to do it again. So I ran away to Paris in France.



In Paris I saw a pâté with a picture of the Eiffel Tower. I was inspired. I too made a picture of the Eiffel Tower with mud. I used twigs for frames. Paris is not backward like Chelm. Here I could be an artist. I am known as a mud artist and am part of the Conceptual art movement. To make my mud art I go back to Chelm for the mud.

We know about the *men* of Chelm (that chimerical Polish town where wisdom always prevails) — but what about the *women*? Finally, a bizarre book, *Women of Chelm*, by Jenny Tango, corrects years of sexism and moral deafness, adding significant insight to injury.

Meet, among others, Hannah the Seamstress, Blima the Silent Movie Star, Fruma the Amulet Maker, and (here) Malkah the Artist. (*Women of Chelm* is available through the author, c/o Chelm Historical Society, 114 Davis Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10310, tel. 718-433-4718. It can also be purchased at Printed Matter at Dia bookstore, 77 Wooster St., NY, NY 10012, tel. 212-925-0325.)

—Susan Schnur

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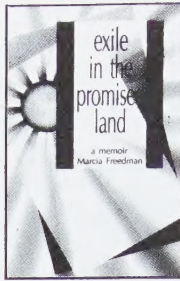
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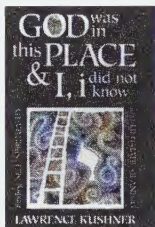
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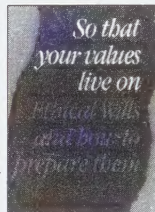
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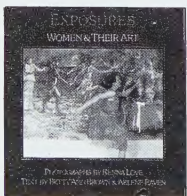
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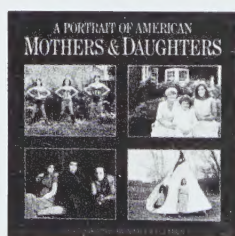


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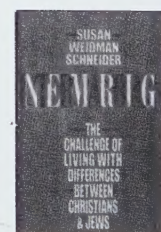
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life. While many of those "marrying out" a generation ago sought religious anonymity, today ethnic pride and intermarriage can go hand-in-hand. A comprehensive and sensitive look at the realities of marriage for many men and women today. For an autographed copy, send \$19.95 plus \$3 postage and handling to LILITH 250 West 57th St., Suite #2432 N.Y., N.Y. 10107.

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Gertrude Bablinska

Rescuers: Portraits in Moral Courage

by Gay Block and Malka Drucker (*Holmes and Meier Pub.*, 1992, \$29.95) presents 49 sterling first-person accounts of and by Christians who saved Jews during World War II. (That's forty nine handkerchiefs' worth.) Powerful photographs accompany each narrative.

Perhaps, indeed, this book is the most important Holocaust text of all. If our core task is to learn from the past so as not to be condemned to repetition, *Rescuers* presents us with the ultimate world-altering, future-oriented challenge: to walk a mile not in a Jew's shoes, but in a rescuer's. It implies that we must each bother to take deeply into our hearts the following question: *How compassionate, how altruistic am I, really?*

From this brimming volume, here are two excerpts. First, Nehama Tec's list

of characteristics that Holocaust rescuers share:

1. They don't blend into their communities. This makes them less controlled by their environments and more inclined to act on their own principles.
2. They are independent people and they know it. They do what they feel they must do, what is right and the right thing is to help others.
3. They have a long history of doing good deeds.
4. Because they have done the right thing for a long time, it doesn't seem extraordinary to them. If you consider something your duty, you do it automatically.
5. They choose to help without rational consideration.
6. They have universalistic perceptions that transcend race and ethnicity. They can respond to the needy and helpless because they identify with victims of injustice.

Also, an excerpt from the story of Gertruda Bablinska, a Catholic Pole:

"For fifteen years, I worked for a very rich Jewish family named Stolorowicz. First the father was taken to Auschwitz. Then Mickey's mother became sick and died. Mickey came to me and said 'I have no mother. Will you be my mother?' ...I was a single, forty-year-old Catholic woman. How was I going to raise a Jewish child? But finally I told him I would be his mother.

"As soon as the war ended I knew I had to get Mickey to Israel. There was no other way that I could raise a boy to be a Jew... Mickey's mother had told me that her relatives in Israel would help us so I went to them. I will never forgive them for what they did to me. They gave me a little room upstairs with no water and no toilet. They wanted to adopt Mickey and send me back to Poland. They said they would not pay for school for Mickey if I stayed. Mickey cried and said to me, 'You are my mother. I don't want them for parents.'

"So I went to work as a maid to pay for Mickey's schooling...And for 18 years I lived in this same room with no water and worked as a maid so I would have money to pay for the room and for things for Mickey. And Mickey grew up to be such a good Jew. I am so proud of him. He is the most wonderful son in the world."

The schedule for the 1992-1993 companion exhibit to *Rescuers of the Holocaust*: Aug.9-Nov.1, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Nov.20-Jan. 6, 1993 Tufts University, Medford, Mass.; Jan. 17-Mar. 15, Center for the Arts, Virginia Beach; Apr. 18-June 5, Fine Art Center, Des Moines; Nov.1-29; Levis Jewish Community Center, Boca Raton.

— Susan Schnur

CALLING THE EQUALITY BLUFF: WOMEN IN ISRAEL

Edited by Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir. Pergamon Press, 1991, \$19.95.

For better or for worse, women in Israel face challenges that are distinctive, if not unique. Focusing on the particular in Israeli women's lives, the 40-plus articles collected in *Calling the Equality Bluff* dispel stereotypes about women in the work place, the kibbutz, the army, the family, politics, and religious life. The sociological studies that make up much

of the book are nicely complemented by personal pieces, some of them quite compelling: Palestinian women talking about their families, hopes, and frustrations; Jewish women—from a General to a factory worker—talking about their achievements and disappointments.

Broadly feminist in orientation, this collection is required reading for anyone who wants more than a nodding acquaintance with the complex, heroic, fallible women of Israel.

— Beth Uval

MARS AND HER CHILDREN

By Marge Piercy. Knopf, 1992, \$20 hardcover, \$11 paperback.

Whether crafting a paean to the onion, reliving childhood experiences, or sardonically exposing the dark underside of the modern technological age, Marge Piercy writes through her body. Despite the differing tones of her religious poems and those which describe such mundane activities as building an addition onto one's house, Piercy's language, as well as the care with which she casts her subjects, demonstrates a unified approach to all aspects of human existence—one firmly rooted in physical experience.

With its mix of humor, Jewish spirituality, feminism, political activism, sexuality, environmentalism, and extraordinary literary



Marge Piercy

talent, Piercy's latest collection provides poems to recite during *kabbalat shabbat* as well as to post on the refrigerator. A favorite title: "It Ain't Heavy, It's My Purse." A favorite stanza:

"Cleveland was the promised land of my childhood, where my bubba cooked kosher and even her cat had good manners and sat at the table, and she told me that/when they were alone, he used a knife and fork. /I always hoped he would do it while I was eating."

— Karen Prager

FOUR CENTURIES OF JEWISH WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY: A SOURCEBOOK

Edited by Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton. Beacon Press, 1992, \$18.00.

This unique anthology unveils unpublished or little known spiritual writings by Jewish women from 1560 through the present. Among the over one hundred private letters, poems, memoirs, prayers, rituals and essays we find *tikhines*, the Yiddish prayers women wrote and recited in 17th century Europe; hymns from the first Hebrew Sunday Schools in the United States; diary entries from such leaders as Henrietta Szold and Hannah Senesh; women's reflections on God and the Holocaust; Israeli poets; Yemenite Hebrew songs; essays by rabbis, and contemporary rituals for New Moon celebrations and for healing from rape.

This extensive collection is an important addition to the reclaiming of Jewish "herstory" as well as a magnificent resource for creative religious services, speeches and personal inspiration.

—Hadar Dubowsky

THE BACK OF MEN'S HEADS

Last year my husband and I went to Israel to celebrate our son's wedding. The day before the ceremony he had an *aliyah* (the honor of reading from the Torah) at the Kotel (the Western Wall) in Jerusalem. He'd had his bar mitzvah there 14 years earlier, and wanted to celebrate this milestone there as well.

When my husband and I entered the plaza at 8:30 a.m., it was already bustling with tourists, the many relatives of bar mitzvah boys having their celebrations that morning, and the hassidim at their morning prayers.

My husband, son, and brother-in-law went to make arrangements for the *aliyah*. I entered the women's section of the Kotel, separated from the men's by a high partition. I said my prayers and then returned to the entrance where I could watch the various bar mitzvahs. The women in their long-sleeved dresses, colorful kerchiefs covering their hair, shouted words of encouragement to the celebrants, trilling and throwing candies. Above, on top of the Wall, soldiers stood guard, holding their guns.

One bar mitzvah boy caught my attention. Slender, olive-skinned, and dark-eyed, he was dressed in a beautiful red coat embroidered with silver and gold; a gold hat glimmered on his black hair. His father, brothers, and uncles celebrated with him, while his mother, sisters, and aunts clapped and shouted from the women's section. Their joy was wonderful to share, even for an outsider. What a beautiful family they were!

The sky was so blue, the May sun so hot—a *chamsin*. I had that special feeling one only experiences at the Kotel. Sweating, uncomfortable as I was, I could not tear myself away from watching this particular family.

I felt her presence next to me, even before I saw her. An attractive, older woman, in a dark print dress, stood at my side, a white lace scarf covering her graying hair.

"Isn't that coat beautiful?" she asked me in Hebrew.

"Yes," I replied. "I have been admiring it and the boy's family for quite awhile."

"You know," she said after a moment's pause. "That coat must have been handed down from generation to generation. Where do you think they are from?"

"I think they're from Kurdistan," I answered.

"I'm going to ask them," the woman said. In a minute she returned.

"You're right," she said. "They are from Kurdistan. They seem to be a very happy family. The Kurdish Jews I know don't have much materially, but they have strong family ties and are happy with whatever little they have. They observe all the Jewish celebrations. That coat, the woman said, has been in their family for years, going from father to son



The view from the women's section at the Western Wall.

Two women,
Holocaust
survivors, and
a boy's
red coat.



by Hedy
Markowitz

for each one's bar mitzvah. I don't have anything like that to give my children."

"I don't either," I said. "How many children do you have?"

"I have four," she answered.

"And why don't you have anything to hand down to them?" I continued pressing her. She paused before answering me.

"My entire family was killed in the Holocaust and everything we had is gone," she said.

"Where were you from?" I asked.

"Czechoslovakia."

"How did you survive the war?" I asked, not looking at her. I

continued watching the celebrations before me.

"I worked putting bodies into the ovens in Auschwitz."

I felt my hair rise in horror as I turned to look at her. Yet at the same time, I was in awe of this woman. How could she have survived such an ordeal, have four children, live a seemingly normal life, and sleep at night? I felt her strength.

"Where are you from originally?" It was now her turn to ask the questions.

"From Holland," I answered. "My entire family was killed during the war, too. I am the only survivor."

"You must have been a very little girl at that time," she said, looking at me closely. "How did you survive?"

I looked at her, my heart swelling with the emotion of the moment, my eyes stinging with tears.

"I was hidden by many different people. Sometimes I think I survived only by a miracle. I had so many close calls

Perhaps the purpose of my surviving, of my life, is to start my family all over again, to continue the lineage so it won't disappear altogether."

We stood silently, watching the elation of the bar mitzvah; two strangers with a special bond between us—an older and younger sister. We didn't ask each other's names, who we were or what we did. We were related at that moment by our pasts.

"Why did you come here today?" I asked her softly.

"It is the anniversary of my parents' deaths. I come here every year on this day to say *kaddish* (the prayer for the dead) for them. And you?" she asked.

"My son is getting married tomorrow. We came for an *aliyah*."

"Congratulations. I wish you, your son and your family much happiness."

We shook hands and I watched her leave, not really wanting to break the connection, wanting to call her back. She had been sent to me on this special day to tell me that my young parents, so brutally murdered so many years ago at Auschwitz, were here, at the Kotel, giving their blessing to their grandson's marriage.

Hedy Markowitz lives in North Miami Beach. This story is her literary debut.